An Investigation into the Barriers to Education and Employment for Refugees in Wales

IONA HANNAGAN LEWIS

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ABSTRACT

Forced migration is one of the most important issues of our time. By the end of 2017, 68.5 million people were estimated to be forcibly displaced across the world due to factors such as persecution, human rights violations, environmental degradation, and conflict (UNHCR 2017). A small percentage of displaced people come to the United Kingdom, and some have been resettled in areas which have not experienced much inward migration in the recent past such as the rural North and West of Wales and the urbanized Valleys of South Wales. Local authorities across Wales are working to support new arrivals to integrate and to access English classes, employment, and training. The European Social Fund prioritises research that takes place in the convergence areas of Wales – areas of relatively low population density and gross domestic product. This study focuses on the access to education and employment of those who have been resettled through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme in areas of convergence. It presents original data drawn from qualitative and quantitative research across five case study areas and situates the data within contemporary discourses on migration and integration. In doing so, the project highlights the successes and challenges of resettling refugees in some of the UK's most deprived localities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
VPRS	Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme
WIMD	Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Context

The issue of forced migration and displacement are not new phenomena. War, natural disaster, and persecution have always precipitated the movement of people in search of safety and security. Yet, when the picture of the body of a young child washed up on a beach in Turkey appeared in the British newspapers in September 2015, the image brought forced migration to the fore of the national imagination and sparked fierce debate on how Britain should respond (BBC 2015).

In response to the 'crisis', then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK government would expand its involvement in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) programme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement scheme (VPRS) and resettle up to 20,000 Syrians deemed 'most at risk' over the course of his Parliament (Home Office 2017). By the 22nd February 2018, 10,538 people had been resettled under VPRS across the UK, with 645 resettled in Wales (Kershaw 2018). All but one Local Authority in Wales had resettled refugees under the Scheme by 2018 (WSMP 2018).

The Syrian VPRS is one of a number of routes to settlement in the United Kingdom, including application for asylum following arrival and a number of other resettlement schemes, including the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, the Gateway Protection Scheme, and the Mandate Scheme. The VPRS is nevertheless the largest-scale resettlement scheme currently underway in the United Kingdom (National Statistics 2018).

For some Local Authorities in Wales, participation in the VPRS is the first time that they have supported refugee resettlement in the area. Noting that access to education and employment are both markers of and means towards of successful integration (Ager and Strang 2008), this paper thus investigates refugee access to education and employment in Local Authorities new to refugee resettlement. Research with these Local Authorities represents a unique opportunity to chart the processes of unprecedented refugee resettlement as they happen in real-time; to witness which

schemes are put in place to facilitate integration, and to observe the challenges Local Authorities face as they support these new communities.

The European Social Fund, which has funded this project, prioritises research into areas of Wales in which GDP is 75% or less than the European average – the 'convergence' areas of West Wales and the Valleys (Welsh Assembly Government 2010). Case studies have been selected to represent a cross-section of the convergence areas – two in the north, one in the south-West, and two in the post-industrial area of the valleys. We investigate how integration into education and employment emerges at the peripheries of the United Kingdom, away from the multicultural metropolises, and in communities which do not have large ethnic minority populations. This paper identifies the barriers to education and employment for refugees resettled in these communities and explores the implications of these barriers for discourses around migration and integration in the UK.

1.2 Terms

This thesis utilises the international legal definition of the term 'refugee' contained in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), as modified by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1A (2) defines a refugee as any person who,

> *owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR 1951)*

In accordance with the wording of international law, this thesis will use the term 'refugee' to refer to all those who fit the Refugee Conventions' definition, whether or not they have been granted refugee status by an official state body. Sometimes, however, reference will be made to 'asylum seekers', as distinct from 'refugees'. By 'asylum seekers', I mean those who have made a claim to be recognised as refugee by the Home Office of Great Britain, and whose claim remains pending. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme will generally be assigned the acronym 'VPRS'. Unless

otherwise stated, refugees resettled as part of VPRS will be known as 'refugees', 'refugee participants', 'resettled refugees' or 'VPRS participants'.

1.3 The Research Project

The research project began in October 2017, and the first phase (October 2017 - January 2018) was given to planning the project design; including working with the Welsh Refugee Council to formulate the research questions; planning research methodology; and contacting potential participants. Two factors had a considerable impact on the choice of case study areas.

The first were the terms of the project fund itself. The Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarship (KESS II), funded by the European Social Fund prioritises research contributing to sustainable development and the wellbeing of future generations in the so-called 'convergence areas' of Wales. Areas of convergence are the Welsh Local Authorities of lowest GDP, which receive substantial support from the European Social Fund. They are coloured in yellow in figure 1.1.

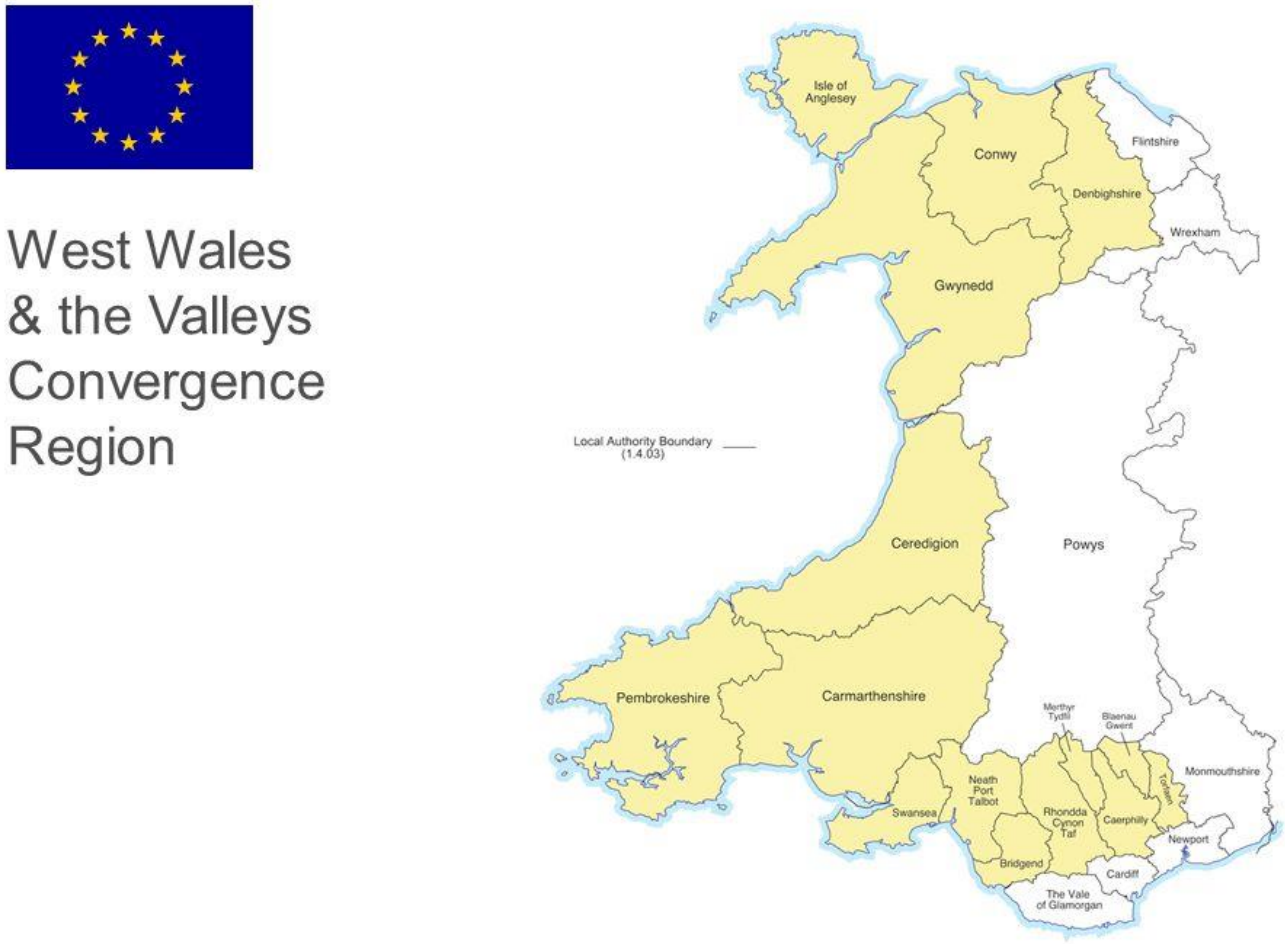


Figure 1.1: Map of convergence areas of Wales (Naylor and Evans n.d)

Second were the priorities of the partner company, the Welsh Refugee Council. Established in 1990, the Welsh Refugee Council is Wales' leading charity committed to protecting the rights and facilitating the empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. The organisation offers a range of support services, from English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to advice for asylum seekers and newly-granted refugees. Since 2016, it has been responsible for delivering integration and pastoral support for refugees resettled in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen, and Bridgend, which has prompted an interest in research which would contribute to the improvement of education and employment support for refugees resettled outside of areas of asylum seeker dispersal.

These two areas of focus narrowed the scope of research somewhat. Furthermore, as the literature review shows, the little research which has been carried out on refugee access to education and employment in the UK has tended to focus on those who have arrived through the 'spontaneous arrivals' (asylum) route, and thus who have been dispersed to the cities of Newport, Swansea, Cardiff and Wrexham – spaces with higher population densities, larger Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and (relatively) well-established networks of support (Crawley 2013; Sanders and Spencer 2016).

Very little scholarship exists on the experiences of refugees living in areas of Wales new to refugee resettlement and none speaks to the experiences of those who have been resettled in the convergence areas. With these factors in mind, this paper therefore analyses the experiences of refugees relocated across five case study areas in Wales. While diverse in their economies, histories and industries, the case study areas are united in that they are all outside the established spaces of asylum seeker dispersal. These areas are briefly described in chapter 4.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions which are explored in this paper are as follows:

1. Are there barriers to refugees accessing education and employment in the convergence areas of Wales? If so, what are they?
2. What is being done, on grassroots, regional, and national levels, to overcome these barriers?
3. How do wider discourses on migration inform refugee access to education and employment?

CHAPTER TWO: Literature review

2.1: Immigration and Asylum in the United Kingdom

Any critical engagement with refugees resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme must first acknowledge that, while the scheme has garnered much media attention, it is only one of a number of possible legal routes to settlement for refugees in Wales. It is beyond the scope of this paper to compare migrants' diverse experiences of navigating the Home Office's visa procedures - though this kind of comparative study would certainly speak to a gap in existing scholarship. However, in order to understand how VPRS differs from the 'spontaneous arrivals' asylum route, it is worth first briefly outlining route to settlement for a person who makes an application for asylum in Britain.

The right to seek asylum is a human right enshrined in international law and backed by the United Nation's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (cited above); the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees; and Resolution 2198 (XXI) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNHCR 2010). If a person is within the borders of the United Kingdom and considers that they may have a claim to be recognised as a refugee in the UK (that is, if they consider that they meet the terms of the aforementioned 1951 Refugee Convention), they must make a claim for asylum at the soonest opportunity either at the port at which they arrive, or at the nearest asylum screening unit. The claimant will receive a screening interview within five days of lodging a claim, in which basic details relating to their case will be gathered. Sometime after the screening interview the claimant will have their substantive interview, in which the details of the case are given and evidence may be presented. The time between the screening and substantive interview can vary – for some it may be weeks, others can wait up to year or more. Following a substantive interview, a claimant may wait up to six months for a decision on their claim. If the case is refused, then the claimant has a right to appeal a decision in the courts, which is known as a First-Tier Tribunal. If the claim is accepted, then the claimant may be granted Refugee Status, Humanitarian Protection, or another form of Leave to Remain (Right to Remain 2018)

While a person is in the process of having their claim for asylum considered, they are typically referred to as an 'asylum seeker'. As an asylum seeker a person is not

entitled to recourse to public funds, is generally barred from seeking employment (unless their profession is on the shortage occupation list) and is liable to be detained at any point (ibid. 2018). If the person is destitute and has nowhere to live, then they will be entitled to asylum support of £36.95 per week and offered accommodation on a no-choice basis in a 'dispersal city' within the UK. In Wales, the dispersal cities are Cardiff, Newport, Swansea or Wrexham (Politowski and McGuiness 2016).

The policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the United Kingdom was ushered in by the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. One of the main criticisms of the policy is that routing asylum seekers around the UK on a no-choice basis often separates them from networks of support, including familial or co-ethnic communities as well as refugee support organisations (BBC 2001). Moreover, asylum seekers are disproportionately housed in the poorest areas of the UK, with the richest third of the country housing only 10% of asylum seekers (Lyons and Duncan 2017). As noted in the project 'Producing Urban Asylum', the contemporary asylum seeker experience is one marked by a "patchwork of provision, privatisation, protest and support that produces an uneven and shifting geography of asylum. As such, experiences and understandings of asylum differ markedly across this patchwork, dependent on dispersal location, history, demography and local politics" (Darling 2013). As I will show, though VPRS participants receive substantially more funded support than asylum seekers, the experience of accessing an inconsistent 'patchwork of provision' is also a common theme in their experience.

2.2 Syrian Resettlement in the United Kingdom

The process of settlement outlined above relates to those 'spontaneous' arrivals who have exercised their right to travel and seek asylum in the United Kingdom. Refugee resettlement is a separate process from that outlined in 2.1, and beneficiaries of resettlement schemes in the United Kingdom are offered a distinct package of support by the Home Office. In response to the escalating crisis in Syria and the ensuing movement of people towards safety, the UNHCR initiated a large-scale programme in 2014 to resettle Syrians in host countries across the world (UNHCR

2015). Resettlement is one of the durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, whereby individuals or families are provided with refugee status in their country of origin; are supported to travel to the host (resettlement) country; and are supported with access to integration including housing, welfare, education, healthcare in the country of resettlement (ibid). The UK Government initially committed to resettling an unspecified number of Syrians, however in 2015 the UK committed to resettling 20,000 by the year 2020 (UNHCR 2018). In 2017 the scope of the scheme was extended to make it accessible, regardless of nationality, to include all displaced by the Syrian conflict and currently residing in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (ibid).

2.3 Contemporary attitudes towards immigration and the 'hostile environment'

Migration has become an increasingly polarising issue across Wales and the United Kingdom. While there exist considerable pockets of support for migrants and multiculturalism, there also exist significant swathes of anti-migrant sentiment. Drawing on data gathered through the focus groups held as part of the National Conversation on Immigration, research by the organisation HOPE not Hate has noted a consistent liberal shift in attitudes towards immigration, but also "marked a growing gulf between people in society with the most liberal outlooks and those with the most hostile" (Carter 2018: 8).

UK migration policy has frequently seemed to affirm hostile attitudes towards immigration, as the 2010 coalition government, led by David Cameron, sought to reduce migration to the 'tens of thousands' by the end of his government – a target which was missed by 160,000 (McNeil 2014). Nevertheless, the policy has been maintained by Theresa May's government, despite concerns about a growing skills shortage in the public and private sectors, in part predicated by a fall in migrant labour from the European Union following the vote to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum (Westminster Legal Policy Forum 2018).

Though border policies have existed for decades, in 2010 the coalition government introduced increasingly harsh penalties for undocumented migrants in the United Kingdom. These policies were mainly implemented through the Immigration Acts 2014

and 2016, and have prevented people from accessing healthcare, schooling, education, employment, state benefits and even driving licenses (Liberty 2018: 4). These have become known as the 'hostile environment' policies, named, in part, after the 'hostile reception' Theresa May promised to give illegal migrants in Britain as Home Secretary in 2012 (Kirkup and Winnett 2012). Through expanding data sharing on service users' nationality and immigration status between service providers and the Home Office, and through introducing new, tougher laws penalising those found to be employing, or offering services to undocumented migrants, the hostile environment policies embedded immigration controls into all aspects of day-to-day life, making it increasingly hard for people to live in the United Kingdom with unresolved migration status. While some may consider the penalisation of undocumented migrants as justifiable, it is important to remember how easy it is to become undocumented in the United Kingdom, as human rights organisation, Liberty, points out:

> *Far from intentionally trying to evade the rules, people often become undocumented because they're unable to scrape together ever-increasing application fees, challenge poor Home Office decision-making, or pay a solicitor to help them keep up with rapidly changing immigration rules. (Liberty 2018: 6)*

That the hostile environment policies have embedded immigration controls into day-to-day life are an overt example of the way in which bordering practices have changed in recent years. Far from the border being only a territorial entity, what we see in the proliferation of the hostile environment policies are rather borders within the boundaries of the nation-state, including schooling, healthcare, and housing. Thus, as Paasi notes, borders are better conceptualised as "sets of sociocultural practices, symbols, institutions, and networks" which are selectively porous – and serve to either grant or deny access to public life, services, shelter, and employment (Paasi 2012: 2304).

2.4 English language proficiency and integration: a causal link?

Perhaps paradoxically, while national policy has shifted towards the expansion of border controls, there has been a parallel growing emphasis on the importance of 'integration' (Casey 2016; HM Government 2018; Bell and Plumb 2017). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an in-depth analysis of current integration policy, however, of relevance to the theme of this paper are contemporary discourses which link proficiency in the English language (or lack thereof) to integration outcomes including community cohesion and the economic dis/advantage of migrant communities.

In his ministerial foreword to the 2018 'Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper', Rt Hon Secretary of State Sajid Javid recalls that, as a young boy, he would sometimes have to miss school to translate for his mother in the doctor's surgery, because "more than a decade after arriving from Pakistan she still barely spoke a word of English", which for him was an "early introduction to the ways in which issues such as language skills create barriers to integration" (HM Government 2018: 9). The strategy Green Paper draws heavily on the 2016 Casey Review, which reported English language proficiency as a "strong enabler of integration" (Casey 2016: 14).

The review cites as a matter of concern the fact that, according to 2011 Census data, "8.4% of the population of England and Wales (aged 16 and over) did not have English as their main language (around 3.6 million people)", while more than "760,000 people aged 16+ in England […] could not speak English well or at all" (ibid: 94). Dame Casey cites data from a non-peer reviewed discussion paper by Zhu and Miranda (2013), which attributes the mere fact of having English as an additional language to "a wage gap […] of 26% for men and 22% for women, and a lower employment rate (48.3%) for those who are non-proficient in English than those who are proficient (65.4%)" (Casey 2016: 94). Furthermore, Dame Casey suggests a negative causal relationship between low English proficiency and Britain's collective sense of 'national identity', citing that:

> *"95% of people living in this country think that to be considered "truly British" you must be able to speak English (up from 86% in 2003) 194 and 87% of people with English as their main language felt they belonged strongly to Britain compared to 79% of people without." (ibid: 97)*

The explicit narrative around integration in both the Casey Review and the Green Paper is that the English language is one of the core tenets of integration, and that English language proficiency has a causal effect on outcomes such as migrant access to services, to the labour market, and affiliation to a British national identity. The Casey Review's selective use of available data, most notably from the Zhu and Miranda study, further entrenches the narrative that poor language proficiency may be to blame for migrants' labour market disadvantage and contributes to segregated communities. In order to counteract these poor integration outcomes, part of the Green Papers' commitment is to:

> *"boost English language skills – which are fundamental to being able to take advantage of the opportunities of living in modern Britain such as getting a job, mixing with people and playing a full part in community life." (HM Government 2018: 14)*

Considering that funding for ESOL in England through the Adult Education Board has dropped by 56% in real terms since 2010, the Green Papers' commitment to 'boosting English language skills' is welcome (Foster and Bolton 2018: 3). However, both the Review and the Green Paper have garnered criticism from voices within academia and non-governmental organisations, who suggest that the causal relationship between English language proficiency and poor integration outcomes in these documents may be overstated. First, the elision of the categories of not speaking English 'at all' with 'very well' is problematic, as there may be considerable difference between what one person means when they say they do not speak English 'very well' with another. Subtraction of the figures for people in the 'not very well' category leaves a significantly reduced figure, suggesting that the number of people who cannot speak English stands at 18,000 (Goodfellow 2018: 47). Second, no reference is made to those who may consider Britain's Celtic languages (Welsh, Cornish, Gaelic, or Scots Gallic) rather than English to be their main language. Neither is there indication that the population of those who do not consider English to be their first language may include

those who are nevertheless proficient in the language. Finally, neither the Casey review nor the Green Paper explore how linguistic proficiency may intersect with entrenched structural inequalities such as insecure immigration status, racial inequality, social isolation, and anti-migrant sentiment to produce poor integration outcomes for migrant communities. The Casey Review's insistence on English language proficiency as a marker of integration thus presents an assimilationist model of integration which allows little acknowledgement of the diverse, multilingual realities of communities in Britain. It is this subordination of linguistic diversity which linguist Michael Clyne terms the 'monolingual mindset', an ideology which insists that to be truly integrated in a nation-state the population must speak one hegemonic language – in this case, English (Clyne 2005; Piller 2016).

Yet, as this research will show, a conceptualisation of integration which foregrounds English language proficiency as a marker of integration can obscure the entrenched historical, structural, institutional and cultural determinants of racial inequality to which refugees are subject (Ashe 2018: 33).

2.5 Conceptualising refugee integration

In their 2008 work, 'Understanding Integration: A conceptual framework', Ager and Strang drew on extensive fieldwork in refugee-impacted communities to develop a framework by which to understand core tenets of integration, illustrated below:

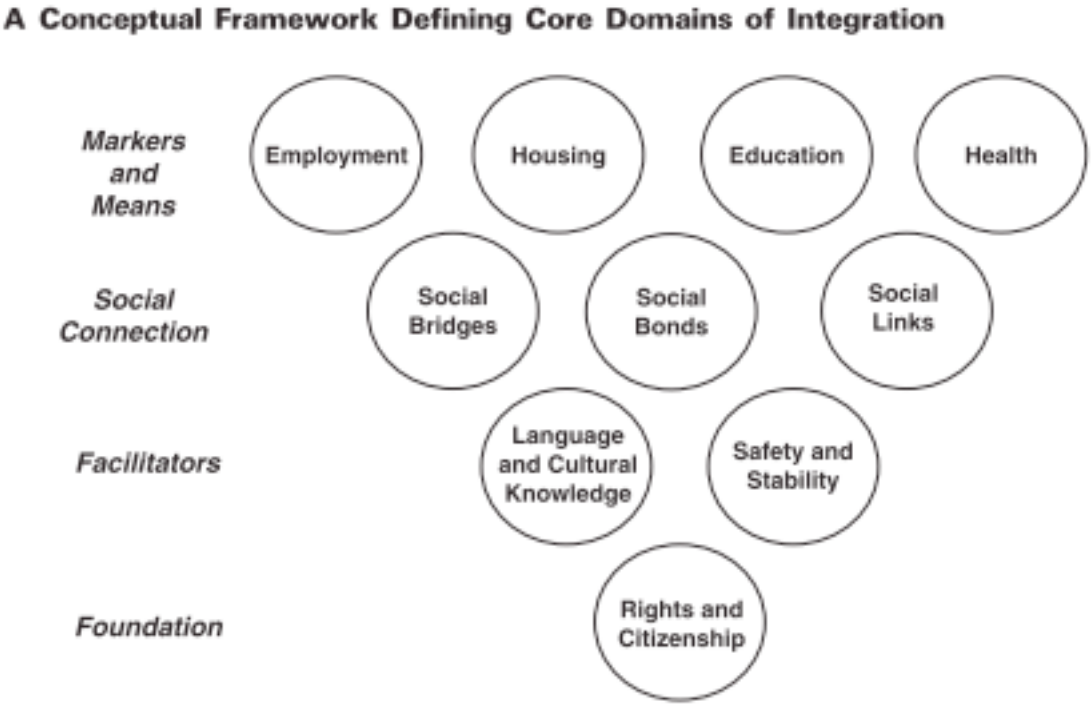


Figure 2.1: A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration (Ager and Strang 2008: 170)

As shown in Figure 2.1, the framework conceptualises integration according to ten 'domains' across four tiers. The foundational tier is that of rights and citizenship. In the context of integration in the United Kingdom, Ager and Strang developed this tier to focus on "the extent to which refugees are provided with the basis for full and equal engagement with society", which is "fundamental to understanding the practices and principles of integration" (2008: 176-177). Employment, housing, education and health appear in the framework as both markers of and means towards achieving integration. The aspect which link the foundational and means/marker tiers is that of social connection. Refugee access to social connection is influenced by the 'facilitator' tier, in which knowledge of the host-country language and culture, as well as a sense of safety and security, can either facilitate or inhibit a refugee's access to social connection, and

thus to the four means/ markers of integration. In the sense that integration is often theorised as a process of 'removing barriers' to integration, as in the title of this thesis, Ager and Strang's analysis situate the 'facilitator' as a key site in which "actions could serve to facilitate (or constrain) local integration" – that is, in which barriers could occur if the state does not act to remove them (ibid: 181-182).

It is significant that, in Ager and Strang's conceptualisation, language proficiency is situated as being but one part of a much broader process on integration. This conceptualisation resonates with contemporary research on the role of host-country language proficiency in integration, which suggests that Britain is "segregated by housing and income more than by ethnicity and its proxy, linguistic repertoire" (Dorling 2012, cited in Simpson 2015: 205).

As regards refugee labour market outcomes, research by sociolinguist Ingrid Piller on the poor labour market outcomes of those resettled on the UK's Afghan interpreters' resettlement scheme has shown that "the assumption of a straightforward relationship between English language proficiency and access to the job market is overly simplistic", and that focus on "migrants' alleged language deficiencies can serve to hide systemic barriers to employment" (Piller 2016: 66). This is supported by research on refugee employment in Wales, which finds that, though linguistic proficiency correlates with labour market outcomes, the impact of linguistic proficiency on refugee employment is not sufficient to be considered a causal factor in and of itself (Holtom and Iqbal 2020).

2.6 Refugee labour market disadvantage

There is some evidence to suggest that refugees face disadvantage in accessing employment, compared with both the UK native-born population and migrants from other backgrounds. Notable research in this field includes that of Oxford University's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). In their 2018 paper, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva analyse data drawn from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) between 2010 and 2017 to conclude that refugees face considerable labour market disadvantage compared with other migrants and the UK-born. Those who migrated to the United Kingdom to claim asylum are "less likely to be in employment, have weekly earnings which are lower, earn less per hour and work fewer hours than natives and those who migrated to the UK for work reasons" (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2018: 856). Moreover, women who

migrated to seek asylum face additional, substantial disadvantage compared to both men who migrated for the same reason, and other women (ibid: 862). Similarly, a 2016 study by the European Commission (also drawing on LFS data) concluded that it takes refugees up to 20 years to have a similar employment rate as the native-born. According to the European Commission's data analysis, women's rate of employment is 17 percentage points below that of refugee men, and 6 percentage points lower than that of non-EU born women (Dumont et al. 2016: 6).

Reported rates of refugee employment vary. The European Commission study (quoted above) reports an employment rate of 56% (ibid.), while other research has indicated a lower rate of employment of between 20% and 40% (Bloch 2002; Welsh Refugee Council 2007). A f study of refugee employment and skills in Wales has found that, from a sample of 454 forced migrants in Wales, 42% of those entitled to work, were in work (Holtom and Iqbal 2020). These studies are, however, reliant on self-reporting, which render them susceptible to sampling bias. Furthermore, there are insufficient data available on the refugee population as a whole to ascertain to what degree the data sample are representative of the overall population. As Karen Jacobson writes, "[theory] and empirical work on refugee livelihoods is characterized by a notable lack of quantitative data from nationally representative probability samples that have refugees as the target population" (Jacobson 2014: 101). The reader should therefore exercise caution before extrapolating these findings to be generalizable across the refugee population of the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, that available data consistently indicates high rates of refugee unemployment suggests that refugees experience considerable labour market disadvantage, particularly in comparison to the national unemployment rate of 4% (Clegg 2018). There are several factors which have been shown to contribute towards refugee labour market disadvantage. These include: employer attitudes and discrimination; age; education; language proficiency; social networks; gender; length of residence in the UK; gaps in employment or education histories; and the extent to which refugees intend to settle in the UK (Bloch 2002; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2018; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2017; Crawley 2013; Crawley and Crimes 2009).

COMPAS's analyses of the Labour Force Survey has found that, while on the whole immigrants tend to have better health outcomes than natives in the UK, those who

migrated to seek asylum tend to have worse health outcomes. Those who migrated to seek asylum and have a long-term condition are more likely to report that the condition affects the number of hours' work they can undertake (Giuntella et al. 2017).

Furthermore, those who are subject to extended periods of time in which they have no right to work experience additional disadvantage in accessing the labour market once they have right to work. A recent report from the campaign Lift the Ban has built the evidence base for allowing asylum seekers right to work after they have waited 6 months or more for a decision on their claim (Refugee Action 2018). They report that one study estimated the cost of the pre-2000 employment ban for asylum seekers in Germany at forty million euros per year and referred to an "early integration window" in which "early investments yield disproportionate results" (ibid: 12). Similarly, findings from a Swiss study found that "the longer someone waits for a decision on their asylum claim, the lower their subsequent chances of finding employment." (ibid: 13).

2.7 Refugee Integration in Wales

While immigration is an area of governance that is not devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government, many of the sectors contributing to refugee integration are, including health, housing, education, and travel. The devolved administration of Wales has, in recent years, developed several policy initiatives to support refugee integration in Wales. In April 2017, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee published 'I used to be someone', its report on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. The report made 19 recommendations for the Welsh Government to implement to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. They covered:

- *facilitating integration, by updating the Community Cohesion Plan, expanding the role of community cohesion co-ordinators, extending concessionary transport to refugees and asylum seekers, and improving English for Speakers of Other Languages teaching provision;*
- *supporting both refugees and failed asylum seekers after the asylum process, through help for refugees to find accommodation, better access to education and employment and action to prevent destitution;*
- *making Wales the world's very first 'Nation of Sanctuary'*

(ELGC 2017: 6-7)

The Welsh Government accepted all but one of the 19 recommendations (relating to concessionary travel for refugees and asylum seekers), which have been included in the Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (Welsh Government 2019).

Regarding language proficiency, in 2014 the Welsh Government distanced itself from the Westminster administration through the introduction of an ESOL Policy for Wales in 2014 (updated in 2018) and its commitment to "continue to fund ESOL as an Essential Skill" (Welsh Government 2018: 15). In 2017, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership received funding from the Home Office to employ an ESOL co-ordinator, tasked with the review of ESOL services across Wales, with a particular focus on whether ESOL provision was meeting the needs of people relocated under VPRS and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). The ESOL co-ordinator for Wales, Erica Williams, published a review of language provision in 2017, which concluded that, on the whole, ESOL provision lacked capacity to meet the needs of resettled refugees, who were often arriving with low levels of proficiency in English and, frequently, low levels of literacy in their first languages. The report found that informal ESOL (utilising the voluntary sector) was often used to 'fill the gaps' in local provision. The report considered that, in some cases, informal provision "may be more appropriate because of learning styles" and identified a need for employment-focussed ESOL (ESOL+), though this is currently only being offered in Cardiff and Vale College (Williams 2017:4). Finally, the report called for increased co-operation and information sharing between Local Authorities to pool resources and share best practice in delivering ESOL. A pan-Wales ESOL forum for Local Authorities involved in resettlement has since been established.

In terms of employment outcomes, the development of education, skills and training are prioritised under the national strategy for Prosperity for All (Welsh Government 2017). The 2015 Well-being of Future Generations Act envisions, among other goals, that of a "prosperous Wales […] which develops a skilled and well-educated population", and a "Wales of cohesive communities" (Welsh Government 2015).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline some of the contemporary discourses around immigration and integration, both in Britain and Wales. While immigration policy is a matter reserved by the Westminster administration, the Welsh Government holds responsibility for many of the core domains of successful refugee integration, as defined in Ager and Strang (2008). The political context in Wales can be considered to be broadly sympathetic to achieving positive outcomes for refugee integration, particularly in contrast to the 'hostile environment' policies pursued by Theresa May's government. Furthermore, the Welsh Government's commitment to funding ESOL for all as an essential skill stands in positive contrast to the narrative from the Westminster government, exemplified in the Casey Review, which condemns low levels of English language proficiency in England while simultaneously cutting funds to ESOL provision (Casey 2016; Foster and Bolton 2018). The Welsh Government's commitments to developing a skilled workforce, increasing linguistic proficiency, and supporting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, as evidenced the Refugee and Asylum Seeker delivery plan and the ESOL policy for Wales, provide a strong context for improving integration outcomes for migrant communities in Wales. Nevertheless, as this thesis will show, there remain structural barriers which prevent those resettled on VPRS from accessing education and employment in Wales – issues which may impede their full, successful integration into both the Welsh labour market and society. Original research and data on these barriers are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE : Methodology

3.1 Overview

My research adopts a mixed-methods approach. First, I conducted a strategic review of existing literature on refugee education and employment. The literature review identified gaps in existing scholarship on the experiences of forced migrants in Wales, particularly in areas new to refugee resettlement. Through the literature review and close collaboration with the Welsh Refugee Council, I identified the key research questions (outlined in section 1.4, above). These formed the basis of a questionnaire, which was piloted with forced migrants in the City of Sanctuary Advocacy Forum, ahead of revision and distribution in January 2018 to all people over the age of 16 in the five case study areas. Questionnaires gathered data relating to participants' age, gender, marital status, first language literacy, education and employment history, current employment and study, and aspiration. 45 questionnaires were returned. Data gathered through questionnaires formed the basis of focus groups, held by myself and academic project supervisor Dr Mike Chick, which were conducted in each case study area between February to June 2018. Interviews and focus groups which were led by Dr Chick are ascribed the initials 'MC' in the excerpts reproduced in this thesis, while those that were led by myself are ascribed the initials 'IHL'. A total of 58 resettled refugees over the age of 16 participated in the focus groups, which were audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, we conducted interviews with 26 stakeholders across the case study areas, including local authority employees; education and employment professionals; and resettlement caseworkers.

3.2 Ethics

There were particular safeguarding considerations connected to research with the refugee sample group. Refugees resettled on the Scheme have been selected for resettlement by UNHCR and the Home Office based on their meeting a number of criteria assessing vulnerability, which may include any number of the following:

- *Women or girls at risk*
- *Survivors of violence and/or torture*
- *Refugees with legal and/ or physical protection needs*
- *Individuals with medical needs or disabilities*
- *Children and adolescents at risk*

- *Persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (actual or perceived)*
- *Refugees in need of family reunification*
  (from an internal UNHCR document, as reproduced in Bolt 2018: 46).

As such, participants on the Scheme are afforded a degree of anonymity and protection by the Local Authorities charged with their care, and access to the Scheme's participants is understandably restricted for legal and safeguarding reasons. In order to gain participants' consent to contribute to the study, it was therefore necessary to first gain the consent of those acting as gatekeepers.

In cases where this was granted, I then asked local authority management to utilise their regional networks and present the study to potential participants, who were provided with written information, in both Arabic and English, detailing the aims of the research. This method of participant recruitment was chosen as it was hoped that potential participants would feel more comfortable querying or declining to participate in the study if it was presented to them by someone that they knew already. Nevertheless, this model of participant recruitment had ethical implications, as some people may have felt obliged to participate in the study due to the fact that the study was being represented to them by those with whom they had professional ties, or who maintained a duty of care over them.

In order to mitigate against this risk, periods of reflection in which potential participants could choose to opt in or out of the study were built in to the project design: information about the study was relayed to potential participants in the first project phase (October – December 2017), anonymous questionnaires and participation consent forms (in Arabic translation) were distributed and collected in the second project phase (January – April 2018), and focus groups conducted in the third phase (up until June 2018). At each point, participants were informed that participation in the research was entirely voluntary, that they had the right to decline without any impact on either their own – or their family's – rights, entitlements, and benefits, and that they had the right to withdraw consent for their data to be included up until the point of publication. The research proposal was submitted to an ethics advisory committee at

the University of South Wales, who considered the project to be "not straightforward but unproblematic".

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that ethical comportment during research with persons at risk of harm is a process, rather than a fixed, temporal event. That is, whether or not the study is conducted and distributed ethically is not dependant on obtaining initial consent from gatekeepers, an advisory board, or participants alone. Rather, it is a matter for continual revision by a number of actors, including myself, the research participants, the supervisory team, the Welsh Refugee Council, and the University of South Wales.

3.3 Data collection

As stated above, access to the refugee sample was closely protected by gatekeepers including caseworkers and resettlement programme staff. I therefore relied on a non-probability 'convenience' sampling approach to questionnaire data collection, using these gatekeepers to disseminate and collect questionnaires as well as to recruit for focus groups.

A theoretical sampling approach was adopted for the interviews, with data collected on an iterative basis (Bryman 2012: 419). Stakeholders targeted for interviewing were those with responsibility for the organisation or delivery of education and employment services to participants of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme in each of the case study areas.

Due to the non-probability sampling methodology adopted for this research, the reader should note that findings are not generalizable (ibid: 188). Though the questionnaire data has drawn some illuminating insights into the barriers to education and employment for the VPRS participants and into the views and practices of stakeholders in the case study areas, the reader should note that these findings are not representative of the experiences of either the refugee population in Wales as a whole.

3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted on the word-based questionnaire data and transcriptions of the focus groups and interviews. Transcriptions were analysed for

themes and coded using qualitative computer software NVivo. Word-based questionnaire data were transferred to pdfs, and their qualitative data similarly coded on NVivo. To code the data, text that was relevant to a particular theme given a thematic 'node' (examples of nodes include 'gender roles', or 'in-work ESOL'). Nodes were reviewed, grouped and structured to identify dominant themes in the dataset. This method of qualitative data analysis can broadly be termed 'thematic analysis', although as Bryman notes, "this is not an approach to analysis that has an identifiable heritage or that has been outlined in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques" (2012: 579). Rather, the investigation of data for emergent themes is a core tenet of all qualitative data analysis techniques. In using NVivo to code text into nodes and then group those nodes into themes, I have sought to remain as faithful as possible to my perception of the 'spirit' in which participants contributed to the study. This meant reviewing texts with sensitivity to context, non-verbal utterances and tone of voice, as well as the words themselves. However, all research involves a degree of researcher bias, and therefore the themes that I have noticed in the qualitative data inevitably reflect, to quote Bryman, "the analysts' own recurring ideas and topics in the data" (2012: 580).

The questionnaires returned nominal, categorical, and some ordinal data. It was analysed through the computer programmes Excel and SPSS. Data was non-normally distributed. Due to the use of convenience sampling and the lack of scale data collection, I could not make assumptions as to the parameters of the wider population from which the refugee sample was drawn. Data analysis is presented through pie charts, bar charts, and tables (ibid 361).

3.5 Anonymity

All participants, whether refugee, service provider, or otherwise, have consented to participate in the study on the understanding that their data will be anonymised. While anonymity is frequently associated with the use of pseudonyms, in the context of this study the use of pseudonyms alone may be insufficient to mask the identity of the participant. If there's only one Syrian family in a small town in West Wales, for example, and there is only one male of working age in that family, then were this paper to refer to the town by name it would be evident that any reference to a participant seeking work

to support his family in the town could only relate to one person. As such, all references to place names, included the names of regions, towns, groups, or institutions, are avoided.

A technique which further protects participant data is the concept of 'unlinkability', in which multiple pseudonyms are ascribed to a single participant (Pzitzmann and Hansen 2005). This method is employed throughout the data set. All participant names and are pseudonyms.

Finally, while some interviews were conducted through the medium of the Welsh language, discussion with the supervisory team led me to realise that to reproduce those interviews in Welsh may render that participant more easily identifiable. Nevertheless, the need to maintain anonymity had to be balanced with my desire to give adequate space for the Welsh language, as an official language of the country in which the research was conducted. I have therefore translated portions of interview text into Welsh at random. Where an excerpt is reproduced in Welsh in this thesis, it does not necessarily follow that that interview was conducted through the medium of the Welsh language. Similarly, excerpts of interview reproduced in English in this thesis do not necessarily indicate that that interview was conducted through the medium of English.

CHAPTER FOUR: Sample and case study area characteristics

This section starts with a summary of recent data on the characteristics of the five case study areas, and contains some discussion of the appropriate measurements of poverty and deprivation used by the national and supra-national administrations.

4.1. Case study areas

As noted in section 1.3, the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarship (KESS II) is funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO). One of KESS II's key objectives is to support the development of key technologies in the areas which qualify for funding under the convergence objectives (Naylor and Evans n.d.). In order to be eligible for funding under these objectives, regions must "have a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) figure of 75 per cent or less of the European Union average" (Gooberman 2010: 1). In Wales, the regions which are eligible for funding under these objectives are West Wales and the Valleys (Naylor and Evans, n.d.). In the United Kingdom, the only regions eligible for funding under these objectives are West Wales, the Valleys, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (European Commission 2013).

Though all five case study areas for this study are eligible for convergence funding, they nevertheless vary across indices such as rates of employment and minority ethnic and Welsh-speaking populations. While one area, for example, may have a GDP 75% less than the EU average, its rates of employment are higher than both the Welsh and UK averages. The variety in rates of employment shows that, while GDP is widely used as a barometer of both regional and national prosperity, it does not portray the whole picture of a region's economic prosperity and labour market participation. It certainly is not reliable as a measure of a region's welfare. These limitations were identified even at GDP's inception, as in the below excerpt from its inventor, Simon Kuznets:

> *[The] estimates submitted in the present study define income in such a way as to cover primarily only efforts whose results appear on the market place of our economy […]. Economic welfare cannot be adequately measured unless the personal distribution of income is known*

[…]. The welfare of a nation can, therefore, scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income as defined above. (Kuznets 1934: 6-7)

In order to get a fuller picture of regional welfare, several countries now produce regional indices of deprivation. While the terms 'poverty' and 'deprivation' are frequently used interchangeably, deprivation should be understood as distinct from poverty. If poverty can be considered a lack of money and financial resources, then deprivation may be considered a lack of a variety of resources, not necessarily financial (Noble et al. 2000: 6; Atkinson 1998). Nevertheless, both poverty and deprivation frequently occur side-by-side. As Townsend writes,

while people experiencing some forms of deprivation may not all have low income, people experiencing multiple or single but very severe forms of deprivation are in almost every instance likely to have very little income and little or no other resources. (Townsend 1987: 131)

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is now used as the official measure of deprivation for small areas in Wales, or lower layer super output areas (LSOAs). All areas in Britain, regardless of wealth, are categorised into LSOAs, which are built from groups of contiguous output areas and have been generated to be as consistent in population size as possible. Dividing regions into LSOAs provides an effective way to measure and rank areas across eight domains of deprivation; income, employment, health, education, access to services, community safety, physical environment and housing (Noble et al 2000: 5).

While the local authority areas under study for this research project are all areas of low GDP, they vary significantly when measured according to rates of labour market participation and on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Notable is that those case study areas which have the highest rates of unemployment are also those with highest percentage of LSOAs experiencing high deprivation on the WIMD.

Across chapters 5 and 6 the dataset will show considerable variety in terms of the quantity and quality of education and employment support offered to refugees resettled

in the five case study areas. While I shall not infer simplistic relationships between a local authority's rate of deprivation and the quality of support offered to refugees resettled in the area, I nevertheless urge the reader to situate the following findings within the context of the regional variation hitherto outlined.

4.2 Questionnaire Sample Characteristics

45 completed questionnaires were returned. Of these, just over half of respondents reported their gender as female, while just under half reported their gender as male. The majority (over four fifths) of respondents were aged 44 and under. Most reported having a partner or spouse living with them in Wales, and most had children living with them in Wales. I have omitted providing a breakdown of the sample by demographics here as the survey sample is small and, to protect participant anonymity, I have not reported on the demographics of these very small groups.

CHAPTER FIVE: Language and Education

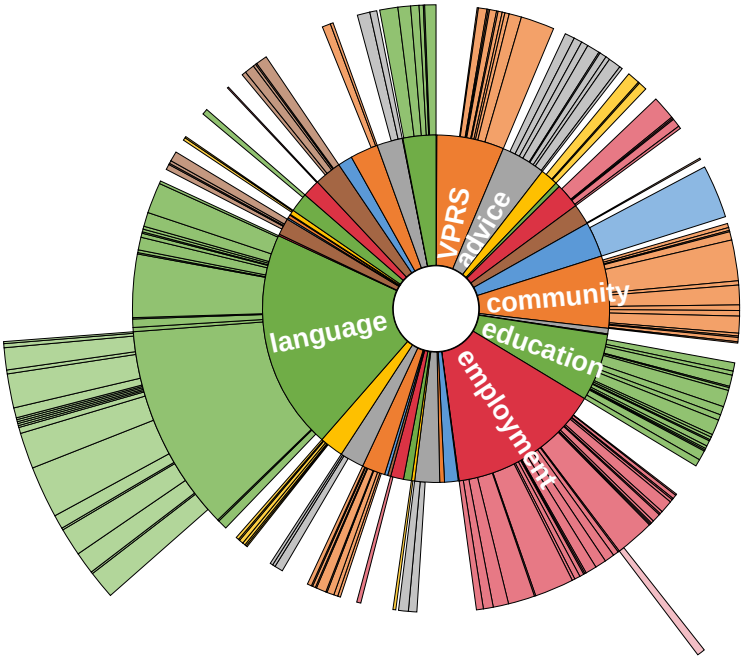


Figure 5.1: 'Sunburst' hierarchy chart from qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

As shown in Figure 5.1, thematic analysis of focus group and interview transcriptions revealed that "language" was the most-referred to theme across the data set. In Figure 5.1, the worded sections of the pie chart reveal the themes cited most often. These include language, employment, education, community, advice, and the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme. Not only does the theme of "language" cover a large proportion of the data set, it also has a number of sub-themes. This section of the thesis will explore the theme of language in more depth. I will situate participants' language learning in the context of the aims of VPRS. I will then explore participants' self-reported levels of language proficiency, both across their first languages and in English. Utilising both qualitative and quantitative data, I shall then explore barriers to participation reported by some research participants. Then, I will draw on qualitative data drawn from interviews and focus groups to explore the extent to which the

research participants considered provision for language learning to sufficiently meet their needs. Finally, I shall close the chapter by situating this evidence within the context of contemporary discourses around language and migration.

5.1 English language learning and the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme

As part of the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the Home Office pledged £10m to fund ESOL provision for those resettled under the scheme (Home Office 2017: 6). As noted in section 2.4 of the literature review, English language proficiency has been framed within United Kingdom political discourse as having a causal link to integration outcomes. Fittingly, in the Home Office's guidance on VPRS for local authorities, additional funding for ESOL is framed as a way to "improve [resettled refugees'] resettlement and integration experience and employability" (ibid). Thus, host community language proficiency is considered to be a way in which refugees can improve their integration outcomes, secure employment, and become independent from the financial support offered by VPRS. As Ager and Strang note in their conceptual framework on the integration of refugees, language and cultural competence are one of the facilitators which provide refugees with access to social bonds and networks and, ultimately, to the markers/means of integration; health, housing, education, and employment (Ager and Strang 2008: 181-182).

Correspondingly, all Local Authorities who resettle refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme receive the Funding Instructions (FI) from the Home Office on its expectations that refugees access ESOL instruction to ensure that "each Adult Refugee is, at a minimum, able to carry out basic transactions in the communities in which they have been placed" (Home Office 2018: 21). The expected process of a refugee's language instruction within the first year is broadly defined in the FI as comprising an 'assessment of an adult refugee's language capability' at the 'earliest opportunity' and, where appropriate, 8 hours a week of Formal Language Training, accessed within one month. According to the FI, provision should be offered to refugees "until they have reached entry level 3 or for at least 12 months after their arrival in the UK (whichever is the sooner)" (ibid). For those assessed as being below a pre-entry level of ESOL, the FI states that "informal language training is a suitable alternative [to

formal language training]" (ibid). Finally, the FI states that funding should be used to overcome barriers to participation in language training, where these exist (ibid: 22).

Considering the length of time it would take a pre-entry learner to attain an qualification at entry level 3 (indicated in Schellekens 2011, below), it is considerably more likely that local authorities following this instruction would commission ESOL for 12 months following a refugee's arrival in the UK than fund a refugee to reach entry level 3. The ESOL Policy for Wales refers to a 2011 literature review by Schellekens, which concluded that "the following predictions can be made for the length of time it could take for a beginner to reach ESOL level 1":

> • *Full-time FE students (450 guided learning hours per year) would need almost four years of study.*
>
> • *Adult students who learn English ten hours a week over 30 weeks a year would need five years and seven months of study.*
>
> • *Adult students who learn English for four hours a week over 30 weeks a year would need 14 and a half years of study.*
>
> *(Schellekens 2011; quoted in Welsh Government 2018: 4)*

Entry level 3, one level below level 1, is considered equivalent to level B1 on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001: 24). B1 is a significant level within an adult migrant context, as it is the minimum level of English proficiency that a person must evidence in order to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain and British Citizenship (Gov.uk. n.d.). In line with Schellekens' estimations, it would almost certainly take an adult student several years to progress from beginner level to entry level 3, or B1 level. As funding for ESOL is only guaranteed for up to a year, the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme can therefore reasonably be said to offer only partial financial support towards resettled refugees' linguistic integration. It is unclear from the Home Office funding instructions who holds responsibility for ensuring resettled refugees attain the necessary level of English proficiency to apply to remain in the United Kingdom once their five years of Refugee status have come to an end.

Within this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that several interviewees who held responsibility for the resettlement scheme highlighted refugees' linguistic competency as an area of particular concern – hence the predominance of the theme of 'language' in Figure 5.1.

5.2 Language learning and overview of relevant data

While Schellekens' above estimation is useful as a rough measure for the purpose of policy making, it is important to bear in mind that language learning is not an exact science. It is not the case that a class of students will all progress with language learning at the same rate, even if the course content, teacher, and classroom environment are the same for all students. This is a key point for language education commissioners, policy makers and pedagogues to remember. Much has been written on the factors affecting language learning, and various models have been developed to offer some suggestion as to how and why learners learn differently, and at different rates (Gardner and Macintyre 1992 & 1993; Mitchell and Myles 2001). As Lightbown and Spada note, "learner variables interact in complex ways", and characteristics as diverse as age, motivation, past experience, and literacy can intersect to produce radically different learning experiences and results (2001: 42). While some of the more apparent variables (such as age and prior education) have been measured as part of this questionnaire, there too are many 'known unknowns' (and indeed, 'unknown unknowns') for this thesis to extrapolate findings into hypotheses on refugee language acquisition in Wales – though this would no doubt be an illuminating enterprise. What follows, therefore, is the presentation of questionnaire data grouped according to a few variables which may impact learners' success and progress in language acquisition (including self-reported first language literacy and motivation to learn). I then present findings related to learners' satisfaction with ESOL provision and structural barriers to access.

5.3 First language proficiency

There is evidence to suggest that linguistic aptitude can impact the speed and success with which learners acquire a new language (Gardner and Macintyre 1992). Furthermore, the link between first language literacy and a learners' success in language acquisition is well recorded in academic literature (Collier 1989; Bigelow & Tarone 2004; Biyalystol 2002; Cummins 1991). Refugee participants were therefore asked about their first language and levels of first language proficiency.

43 respondents replied to the question 'What language do you consider to be your first language?' with all answering 'Arabic'.

43 respondents replied to the question 'How many languages do you know?' 30, or just over two thirds of respondents (70%) reported that they knew one language, while 13, or just under a third (30%) answered that they knew 2 languages or more. Languages other than Arabic in which respondents considered themselves to be proficient included Turkish, English, and 'Sudanese' [sic].

43 respondents replied to the question 'How well can you read in your first language?' The majority – over four fifths (86%) – of respondents reported that they could read 'fluently' or 'fairly well' in their first language, with 12% reporting that they could read 'a little' or 'not at all', and the remainder (2%) responding with 'okay'.

44 responded to the question 'How well can you write in your first language?' 36 respondents, or just over four fifths (81%) reported that they could write 'fluently' or 'fairly well', while 5 (11%) reported that they could write 'a little' or 'not at all' (with the remainder reporting that their writing skills were 'okay').

5.4 English language proficiency

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate each of their skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English on a Likert scale between 1 and 5. A score of 1 meant that they could read/write/speak/understand English "not at all", and a score of 5 meant that they could read/write/speak/understand English "fluently". 42 participants responded to this question. The results are illustrated in Figure 5.2 (below).

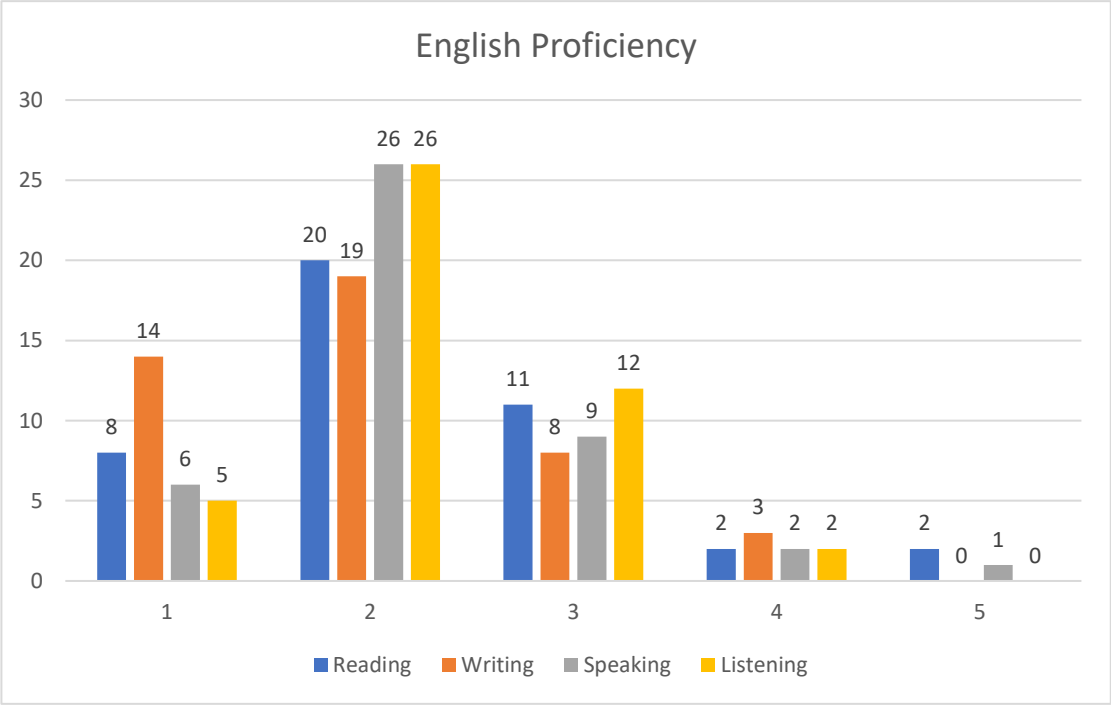


Figure 5.2: Bar chart indicating questionnaire respondents' self-reported levels of proficiency across the four competencies of reading, writing, speaking and listening in English.
Base: 43

As Figure 5.2 shows, while a small number of participants self-reported themselves to be 'fluent', or to read/write/speak/understand 'fairly well' in English, the majority reported their skills as being between 1 and 3 on the Likert scale ("not at all" to "okay"). 39, or 89% of respondents reported that they had not studied English prior to being resettled in the United Kingdom. The majority of refugees who responded to the questionnaire, then, would have been starting their journey of English language learning "from scratch", or at level zero (pre-A1) on the Common European Framework

of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2018: 48). Furthermore, the mixed profile of first language literacy referred to in section 5.3 poses additional challenges for ESOL teachers and commissioners, as students with different levels of first language literacy experience different rates of language learning and will thus have different learning needs.

5.5 Activity

Questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate from a list of activities which they considered their main activity in Wales. 43 participants responded to this question As Figure 5.3 shows (below) 23 respondents considered studying to be their main activity in Wales, ahead of 'caring' and 'unemployment'. No respondents indicated that 'self-employment' or an 'other' activity apart from the list given were their main activities in Wales.

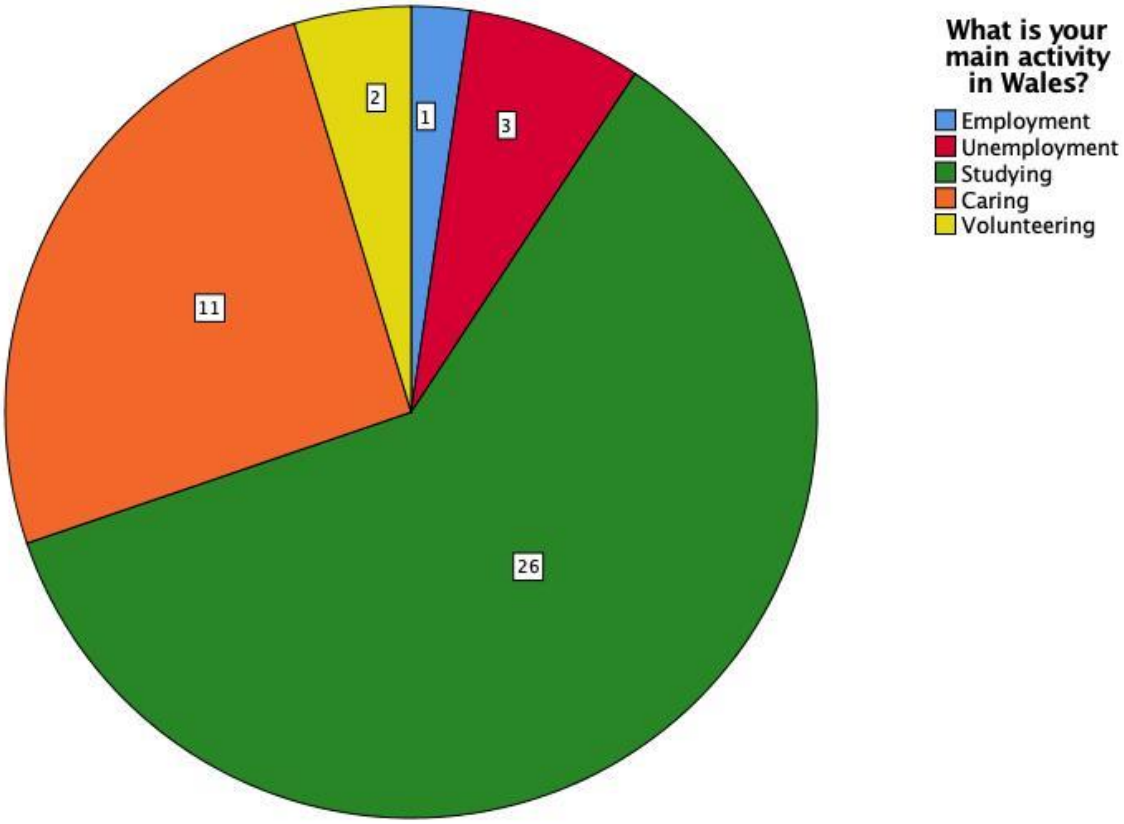


Figure 5.3 Pie chart representing responses to the question 'What is your main activity in Wales? Tick one.'

As shown in Figure 5.4 (below), equal numbers of women and men indicated studying as their main activity in Wales, while more women than men listed caring as their main activity:

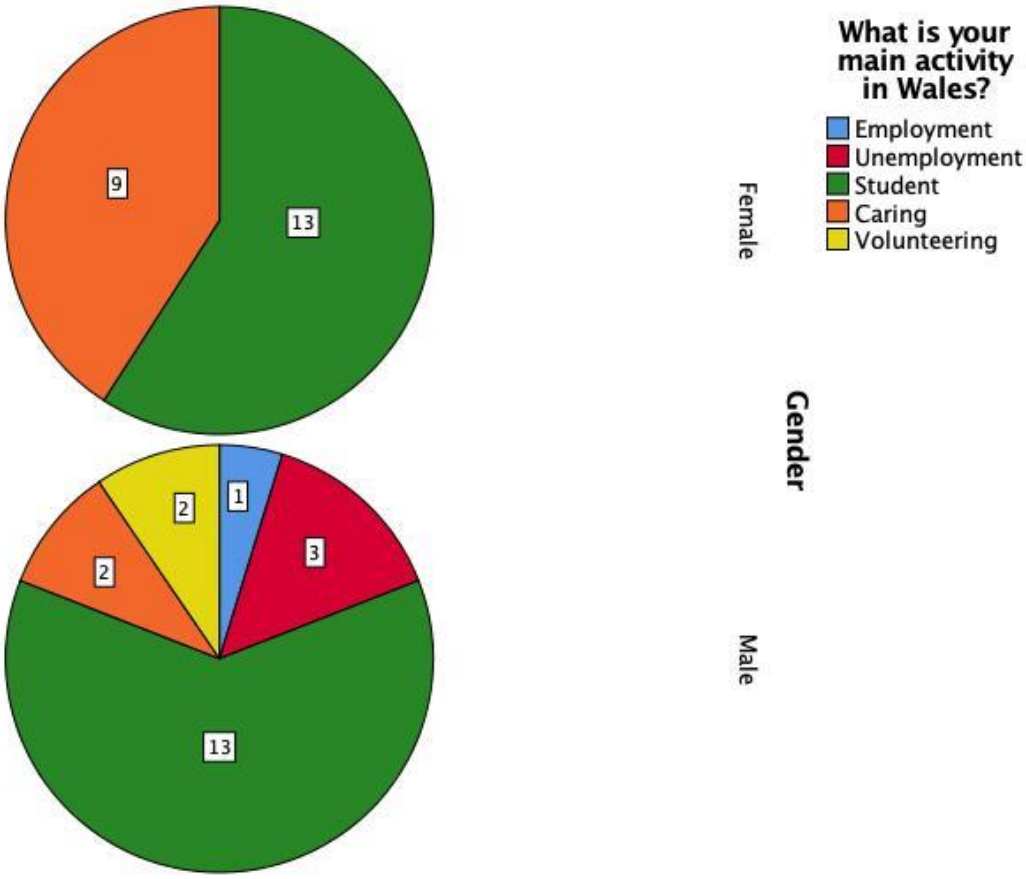


Figure 5.4: pie charts showing frequency of response to the question 'What is your main activity in Wales?', separated by gender.

Given that 41 questionnaire respondents of the questionnaire sample reported themselves to be studying English, participation in ESOL can thus reasonably be considered to have been the sample's main education and employment-related activity at the time of study. Questions around the barriers to education and employment for refugees in Wales must therefore prioritise the question of access to and efficacy of language learning programmes as a route to employment and training.

5.6 Motivations for learning

In order to gauge questionnaire participants' motivations for learning English, they were asked the question 'Why do you attend English classes? Please tick all that apply'. Figure 5.5 (below) is a pie chart which shows the proportions of responses to

this question. Readers should note that the yellow slice is an amalgamation of three similar variables, grouped around the theme of socialising and enjoyment: 'To meet new people', 'To pass time', and 'Out of personal enjoyment'. 43 participants responded to the question. The two most often-selected responses to the question were 'to apply for jobs' and 'to apply for British Citizenship'. Third is the yellow slice, indicating the value of English classes as a means to fill time and socialise. Close behind that is the motivation of wanting to improve English to better care for family, including helping children with schoolwork. Following this was the motivation of needing to learn English to claim benefits, while a significant minority wanted to improve their English language skills in order to apply to University. No participants included a motivation that was 'Other' to the given list.

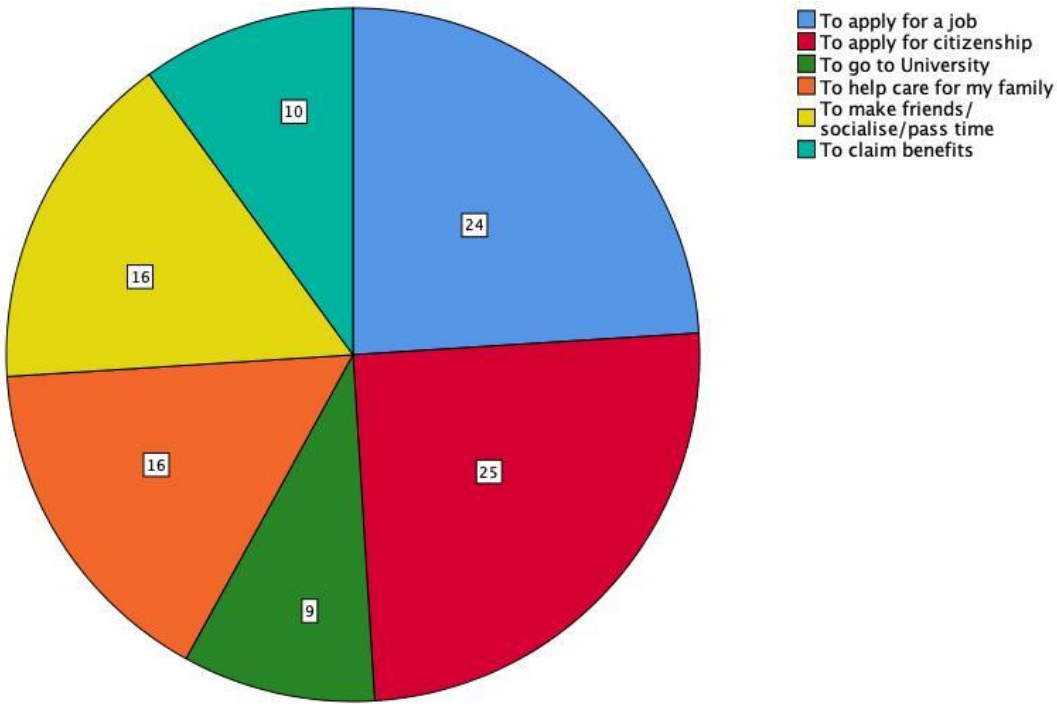


Figure 5.5: Pie chart indicating responses to the question "Why do you attend English classes?"

As Figure 5.6 shows (below) similar numbers of men and women considered applying for British Citizenship to be a motivating factor in learning English. The activities of caring and searching for employment were split by gender. More men than women wanted to learn English in order to search for employment, while more women than men wanted to learn English in order to help care for their families. Nevertheless, 7 female participants listed 'To apply for a job' as a motivating factor for learning English, while slightly more women than men wanted to learn English in order to progress towards Higher Education. As I will show in chapter six of this paper, there tends to be a strong focus on the male refugees' labour market potential within the practices of VPRS, and significantly less emphasis is placed on women's potential to learn and earn. Figure 5.6 demonstrates that there is nevertheless a minority of female VPRS participants who feel motivated to learn English by the wish to secure employment and to attend University.

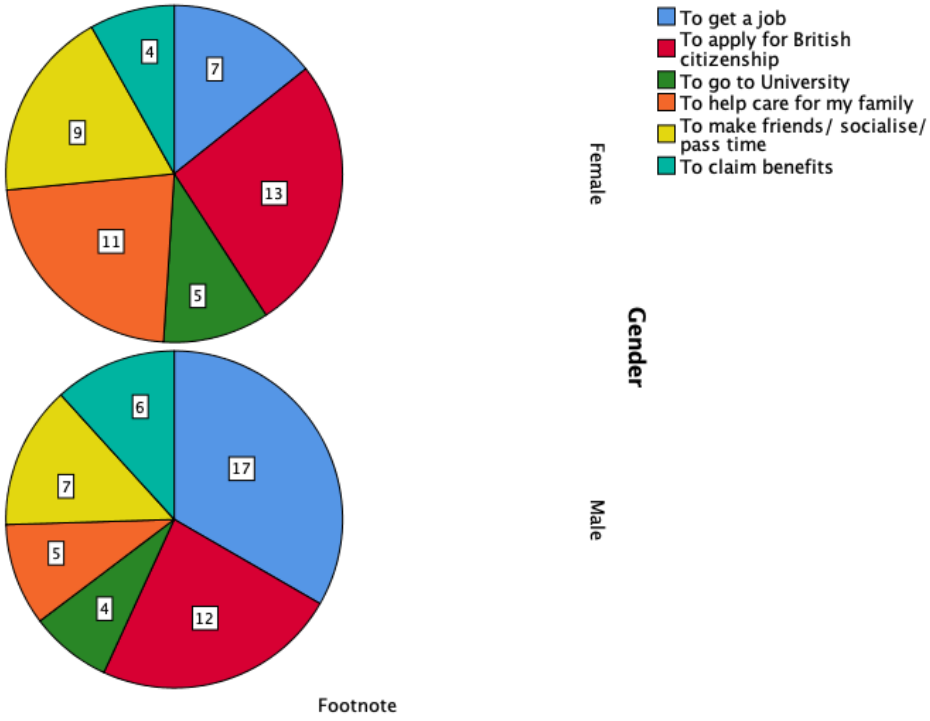


Figure 5.6: Pie charts indicating frequencies of response to the question 'Why do you study English?', separated according to gender.

In considering the motivations of the sample, it is important to note that two of these aspirations have standardised English language requirements attached to them. In order to gain citizenship in the United Kingdom, one must evidence competency in English at level B1 on the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018). Many Higher Education

Institutions in the United Kingdom will not consider an application from those unable to evidence a score of at least 6.5 in an International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) exam, or qualification equivalent to level C1 on the CEFR (British Council 2017).

Having noted the variation in these motivations to learn, it is therefore insufficient to only question the barriers to 'education' (as an abstract construct), as both the education to which the learner aspires and the barriers in their way will vary considerably according to the situation and ambitions of the learner.

For example, a mother who wishes to go to University will face several barriers. The first will be accessing English classes at a suitably advanced level. This issue is made almost impossible by the fact that ESOL is funded as an Essential Skill only to level 2, or GCSE-equivalent and that ESOL at level 2 is typically not accepted as proof of academic linguistic ability by University admissions departments (Simpson 2015; British Council 2017). Second will be the issue of accessing a subject-based course which accepts her at her current level of English proficiency, and which will leads to an accepted pre-University qualification - for example an A-level or Access course. Third will be sourcing affordable childcare. Fourth will be financing her studies whist maintaining her household income. Fifth will be travelling to and from the further education institution at which she is studying. All this before she has even considered applying to the University of her choice.

Thus, in reading the following data on 'Satisfaction with ESOL provision', the reader should bear in mind that one size of ESOL provision does not fit all. Rather, a learners' satisfaction with language learning provision will be intrinsically connected to whether or not they feel the classes are leading them towards their aspirations. The following data should thus be read in this context.

5.10 Satisfaction with ESOL provision

Qualitative data drawn from focus groups showed that two issues strongly impacted VPRS participants' levels of satisfaction with language learning provision; the number of hours of formal ESOL classes offered by the Local Authority, and the issue of having different 'levels' of learners within the same class. These two issues are explored in more detail in this section

5.10 a) Number of hours' ESOL provision

There was a marked inconsistency in the number of hours of ESOL questionnaire participants reported themselves to be accessing per week. This is represented by the scatter chart of Figure 5.7 (below).

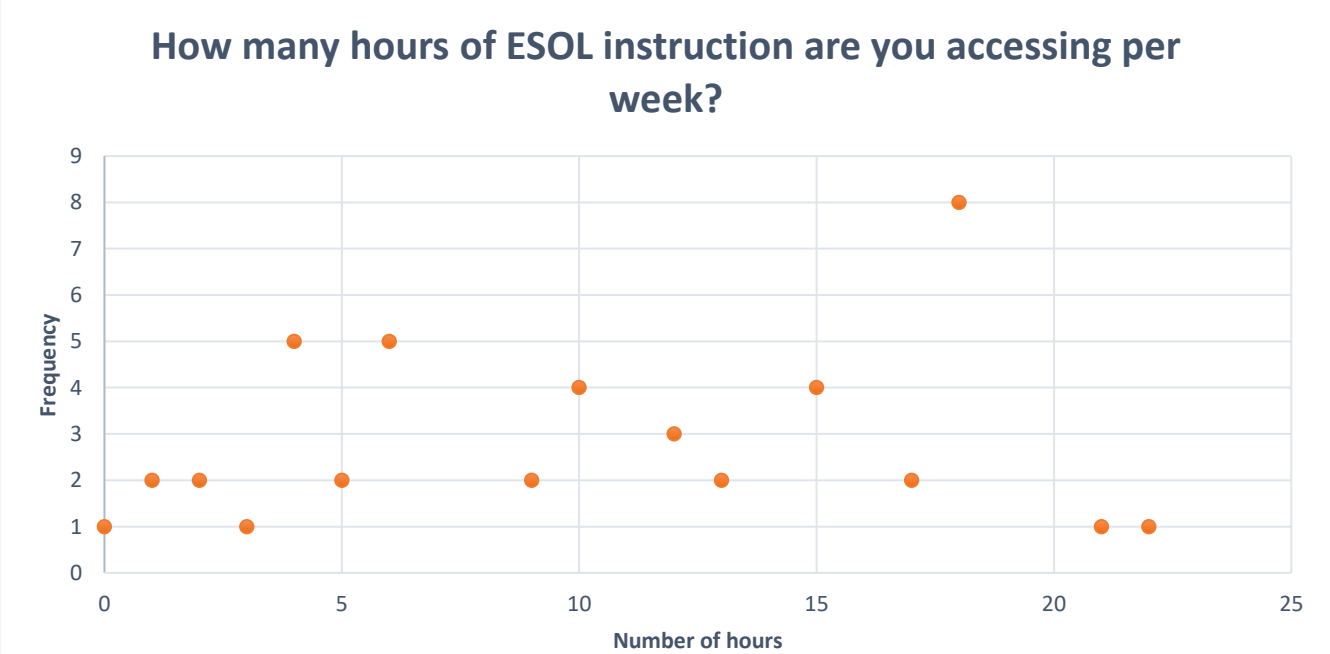


Figure 5.7: Scatter chart representing responses to the question 'How many hours of ESOL instruction are you accessing per week?'

The highest number of hours were reported to be accessed in case study areas 2 and 5, where one participant in each area reported themselves to be accessing 21 and 22

hours of ESOL, respectively. 8 respondents reported themselves to be accessing 18 hours a week – 6 from case study area 2, and 2 from case study area 5. A further 3 people from case study area 2 reported themselves to be accessing 15 hours per week. This regional variation is represented in the scatterplot below:

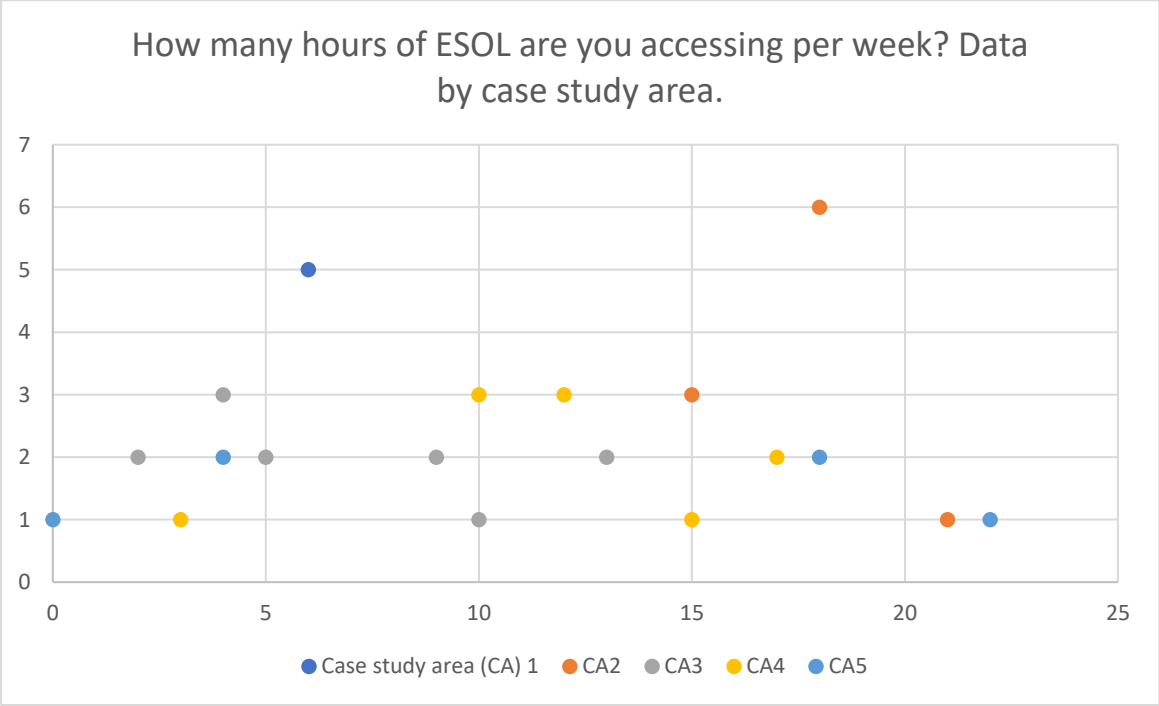


Figure 5.8: scatterplot indicating frequency of responses to the question 'How many hours of ESOL instruction are you accessing per week?' Data shown by case study area.

Despite the wide variety in number of hours of ESOL reportedly accessed by participants, it is important to note that these figures rely heavily on self-reporting, and do not necessarily reflect the number of hours of formal ESOL put on by the Local Authorities for the VPRS participants. The highest number of formal hours of ESOL instruction was found in case study areas 2 and 5, where VPRS participants from both areas are accessing ESOL at the same further education college – Coleg Y. The official total number of hours of ESOL accessed by VPRS participants at Coleg Y is around 16, as shown in the below excerpt with the college's ESOL co-ordinator:

1 IHL: How many hours of language classes are they [VPRS participants] accessing each week?
2 EM: In general, 16 hours per week.

(Excerpt from interview with ESOL Co-ordinator (EM) for case study areas 2 and 5)

In order to account for the high number of hours participants in case study areas 2 and 5 are accessing, one can only presume that participants are including hours of informal or self-study with their reported total. The questionnaires did not gather information on the hours of formal and/or informal ESOL undertaken by participants.

In response to the question, 'Do you feel you are getting enough hours of ESOL per week?' 24 questionnaire respondents reported that they felt they weren't getting enough hours of instruction, while 17 reported that they were. The picture was different between men and women: 14 women and 10 men reported they weren't getting enough hours of ESOL per week, while 7 women and 10 men reported that they were.

Lack of available hours was highlighted by focus group participants as a cause for concern in all areas except area 2. The reasons for a lack of teaching hours varied from case study area to case study area. These are presented below.

5.10 a) i. <u>'More hours don't work'</u>

In area 1, six hours of ESOL instruction simply represented the sum total of hours commissioned for VPRS participants by the local authority area:

1 IHL: Faint o oriau [SSIE ydyn nhw'n mynychu pob wythnos]

2 KL: Yn gyffredinol, chwech awr yr wythnos.

1 IHL: How many hours [ESOL are they accessing per week]?
2 KL: Six hours a week is the general standard

(Excerpt from interview with 'KL', ESOL Co-ordinator for Area 1)

When I enquired as to the reason why VPRS participants were not offered more hours of ESOL, I was advised (both by the ESOL co-ordinator and the local authority) that offering tuition in excess of six hours per week had not been effective:

1 TM: I don't think they should be pushed into having more than six hours a week from week one week two or whatever
2 I think to put them into something and say right you got to have ten hours a week
3 I just don't think it works frankly

(Excerpt from interview with 'TM', local authority employee responsible for VPRS, case study area 1)

I enquired further as the basis for TM's judgement that more than six hours' language provision per week 'didn't work', to which they replied:

1 Well you know [sighs] in some cases people have attended but they've clearly not got that much out of it
2 cos you know I was a bit disappointed you know
3 because I've dropped in on some of the classes just to see how they're getting on
4 and I've been a little bit disappointed that
5 some people that have been here a while
6 their English is still quite poor
(ibid.)

In this case, TM had been disappointed at the rate of VPRS participants' language learning, which resulted in the reduction of the number of hours' ESOL refugees could access. Similarly, KL (ESOL co-ordinator for area 1) noted that, when more than six hours' ESOL per week was commissioned, "nobody turned up".

Nevertheless, six hours per week was deemed by several focus group participants in area 1 to be insufficient:

1 [IHL: what's the problem?]
2 Interpreter: [Indicating focus group participants] They just have three times in the week and just two hours and they think it's not enough
3 IHL: six hours, six hours of English?
4 Interpreter: Yes, six hours in the week […]
5 Interpreter: Is not enough time for them - not enough time!
6 And they have half an hour break
7 IHL: Okay so two hours and then half an hour break?
8 Interpreter: Yeah, no just two hours and uh, include two hours and half an hour

(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

From this data, it's clear that there is a disparity between the number of hours of ESOL provided to resettled refugees in area 1 and the number of hours which the refugees themselves feel are sufficient. Furthermore, the fact that hours were cut on the basis of the co-ordinators' disappointment about the slow rate of language learning

indicates that co-ordinators have insufficient awareness of available literature on estimations of the rate of second language learning (as in Schellekens 2011). Finally, there was little evidence in area 1 that the opinions and feedback of refugees themselves were being used as a basis for judging how many hours of ESOL they should access per week, or the extent to which available provision was helping them to achieve their aspirations.

5.10 a.ii) Lack of infrastructure

In area 3, a lack of ESOL infrastructure in one part of the area was cited as the reason why no more than 4 hours were offered to half the refugees resettled in the local authority. The area is split into two councils – council A and council B. In A, the VPRS participants live near the local further education college, where they are able to access "full time ESOL courses of 15 hours per week, run alongside part time courses", according to the college ESOL co-ordinator, 'WL'. However participants in area 3 reported accessing between 2 and 13 hours per week. In conversation with WL, it transpired that the VPRS participants in council B were accessing part time provision, as there were no full-time classes available in area B:

1 EC: In [case study area 3A] we have full time ESOL courses of 15 hours per week,
2 run alongside part time courses.
3 The Syrians in [case study area 3 B] get Thursday afternoon and Tuesday morning.
(Excerpt from interview with 'WL', ESOL co-ordinator in further education college, area 3A).

Thus, the reason some participants in area 3 were accessing only 2 hours of ESOL a week was that they lived too far from the college to access full-time provision, and that they were not being provided with financial support to travel under the resettlement scheme.

5.10 a) iii. Gender

As shown in figure 5.8, responses for case study area 5 are noticeably split between those accessing no, or few, hours of ESOL a week (between 0 and 4), and those accessing very many (between 18 and 22). A focus group with refugees resettled in the area revealed that the participants accessing the highest number of hours of ESOL per

week (18-22) were male, while those accessing the lowest number of hours per week (0-4) were female.

1 IHL: The men then, how many hours [of ESOL] a week are you getting?
[…]
2 Interpreter: Sixteen hours –
3 IHL: okay so (indicating men) sixteen hours? [male participants nod], [to women] nothing? [female participants nod]
4 nothing, okay
5 Right um so you all learn-you learn in [college name]?
6 [Multiple male voices]: yes
(Excerpt from focus group with VPRS participants, case study area 5)

The main factor which influenced whether or not a participant's gender impacted the hours of ESOL they accessed was whether childcare was included in education provision. For those in area 2, childcare was provided, and number of learning hours were not impacted by gender. This is explored further in section 5.11.a.

5.10 b)'Different levels'

Another aspect impacting language learning satisfaction was the fact of having students of "different levels" in the same classroom, as in the experience of SA, a refugee from case study area 1:

1 IHL: what do you think of the way classes are organised?
2 SA: They don't think it's no organised … it's not organised
3 IHL: Why?
4 BA: uh some people uh learn more
5 SA: Some people have different levels some people can't speak some people can write some people they don't speak and write
6 IHL: In the same class?
7 SA: Yes in the same class yeah
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

The theme was echoed by several professionals involved in refugee resettlement, from caseworkers to Local Authority scheme co-ordinators. In one case, a resettlement scheme caseworker expressed concern about the impact on the learners of having 'different levels' within the same class, suggesting that ESOL providers had a responsibility to ensure that 'different levels' were separated into different classes:

1 OL: There should be a time where you as an ESOL provider know that
2 actually there's a certain percentage of the students at different levels to the other percentage
3 and you need to find a way to separate the two group
4 you cannot continue to teach them at same level
5 because y'know it's a different learning need there […]
6 I wouldn't say it's causing tension
7 but it's not helping the learners in either way
8 it's not helping the low achievers or the high achievers […]
(Excerpt from interview with caseworker, case study area 1)

The problem of having insufficient numbers to separate levels of learners was particularly an issue in case study area 4, where, due to the low numbers of second-language speakers of English in the area, there hadn't been much formal ESOL prior to the establishment of VPRS. Since the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the region, ESOL had been organised jointly between the TESOL department of a nearby University and team of volunteers at a community Church. As was explained by the co-ordinator of the Church group (ND), a lack of resourcing and reliance on volunteer teachers meant that it was difficult to offer a variety of different ESOL levels to address learners' need, and dissatisfaction with mixed-level classes was having an impact on class attendance:

1 ND: They got used to being here,
2 then we started the English lessons
3 and that was challenging because they were all at different levels
4 and that was something we had to work out here,
5 how we would make that work.
6 It didn't work for everybody
7 because some felt so vulnerable at not being able to understand and progress at the same level as others
8 that they stopped coming to the lessons.
(Excerpt from interview with co-ordinator at Church/ community centre, case study area 4)

In fact, learner dissatisfaction with mixed-level classes was an issue even in those case study areas, including areas 1 and 3A, in which ESOL provision had been assumed by the local further and community education providers. Indeed, one learner, Aziz, enrolled in full-time provision in case study area 3A felt so strongly about the impact of 'different levels' in class that he included a three-page testimonial on the issue along with his completed questionnaire, in which he stated:

> In my opinion our attending to the local collage [sic] is not useful at all, because we are at different levels in the classroom
> (Excerpt from Aziz's testimonial, case study area 3).

Clearly, the issue of there being 'different levels' within the same classes was highlighted as an area of concern for learners, teachers, and caseworkers alike. However, as the above excerpts show, there was a lack of clarity was to what the term 'different levels' referred. In some cases, as in the above excerpt from the area 1 caseworker, 'different levels' was a term used to refer to learners' individual 'achievement' in English language learning ("it's not helping the learners in either way it's not helping the low achievers or the high achievers"). However, as in the above excerpt from the area 1 focus group, 'different levels' referred rather to the variety of learners' level of proficiency across the skills of speaking and literacy ("some people can't speak some people can write some people they don't speak and write"). In one case, as in the below excerpt from a focus of ESOL learners in case study area 3, a participant referred to their co-learners' countries of origin as the cause of 'different levels' within the same class:

> 1 FD: We have different levels in our class
> 2 and people from other countries are better than us at English.
> 3 So there are different levels in the class
> 4 big differences
> (Excerpt from focus group, case study area 3).

Some degree of learner differentiation is to be expected in a classroom. However, from the data it is clear that, in some areas, differentiation was therefore perceived by some learners to be hampering their rate of progress. Furthermore, in certain cases differentiation was such a cause for concern for students that it was impacting their motivation and attendance.

5.11 Barriers to access

In 2017, the Wales Strategic Migration partnership (WSMP) commissioned a report mapping ESOL services in Wales. The questionnaire "aimed to gather views on

current ESOL provision from Local Authorities and other parties delivering the UK government's asylum and refugee schemes in Wales" (Williams 2017: 8). The questionnaire received 29 responses, gleaned from Local Authority employees as well as VPRS caseworkers. In response to the question, 'What do you think are the main barriers to learning?', 'childcare', tied with 'low literacy skills', came joint second behind 'confidence' as a barrier to learning (Williams 2017: 15). As in Williams, I, too, have sought to identify the primary barriers to refugees' access to learning in Wales. However, I make a distinction between factors acting as barriers to access, and those acting as barriers to learning. I define 'barriers to access' as situational barriers which prevent learners from accessing classes. For the purpose of this thesis, I define 'barriers to learning' as factors which impede language learning, as referred to in section 5.2. It is beyond the scope of this research to measure the correlation between learner confidence, anxiety, literacy etc. and language acquisition, though these issues are thoroughly explored elsewhere (Gardner and MacIntyre 1992 & 1992; Woodrow 2006; Horwitz et al 1986).

What follows, then, is a discussion of the key structural barriers which impede the refugee research participants' access to language learning.

In the cases where refugee participants felt that they weren't accessing enough ESOL per week, a follow-up question enquired why they weren't attending more hours of ESOL. 31 participants answered this question. The results to this question are shown in Figure 5.9, below:

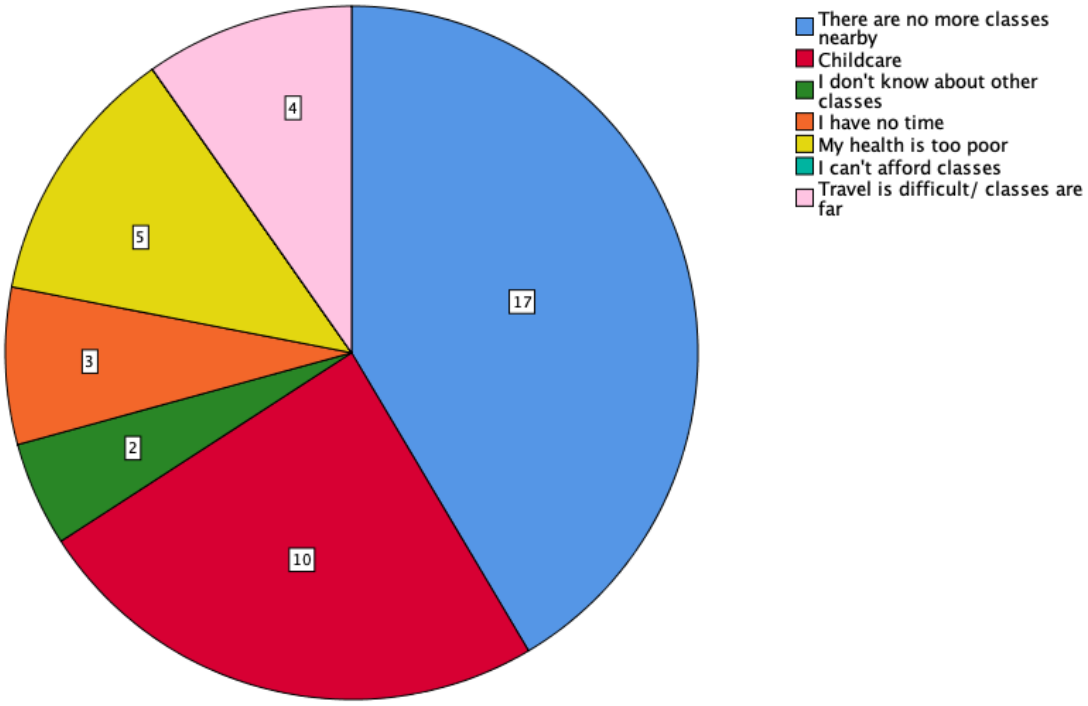


Figure 5.9: pie chart showing frequency of responses to the question, 'If you feel you're not attending enough hours of ESOL per week, why don't you attend more?"

As Figure 5.9 shows, the two most popular reasons for respondents not attending more classes were either that there were no more classes nearby, or else that childcare was a barrier to participation. In contrast to Williams' research were my findings that travel was selected as a barrier to participation only by a small minority of respondents. However, one could argue that the issues of 'travel' and there being 'no more classes nearby' are intrinsically linked. Certainly, issues around travel/location and childcare were two of the most often cited barriers to participation in language learning during the interviews and focus groups. As the community learning co-ordinator for area 1 observed, these were barriers "that lots of learners face; childcare at the right times and travel and transport."

5.11 a) Childcare

Lack of childcare provision as a barrier to participation in language learning was most often cited as a barrier in case study area 5. All the women resettled to this area had had their participation in language learning affected by the fact that the Council had not been able to secure funds to subsidise childcare.

1 IHL: What's the problem?
2 OL: For babies I cannot go college but for baby.
3 IHL: Okay
4 Interpreter: It's the problem with the for the nursery for the children there is no fund for the nursery so they can't leave their children.
[…]
5 Int: In [area 2, the council] are paying for the nursery
6 IHL: So [area 5] they can't have no money for childcare and [area 2] they do?
7 Int: Yes.
[…]
8 IHL: Do all the women have this problem?
9 Many voices: Yes, yes
10 IHL: How many women in the county?
11 Int: Three

(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5. Details omitted for anonymity)

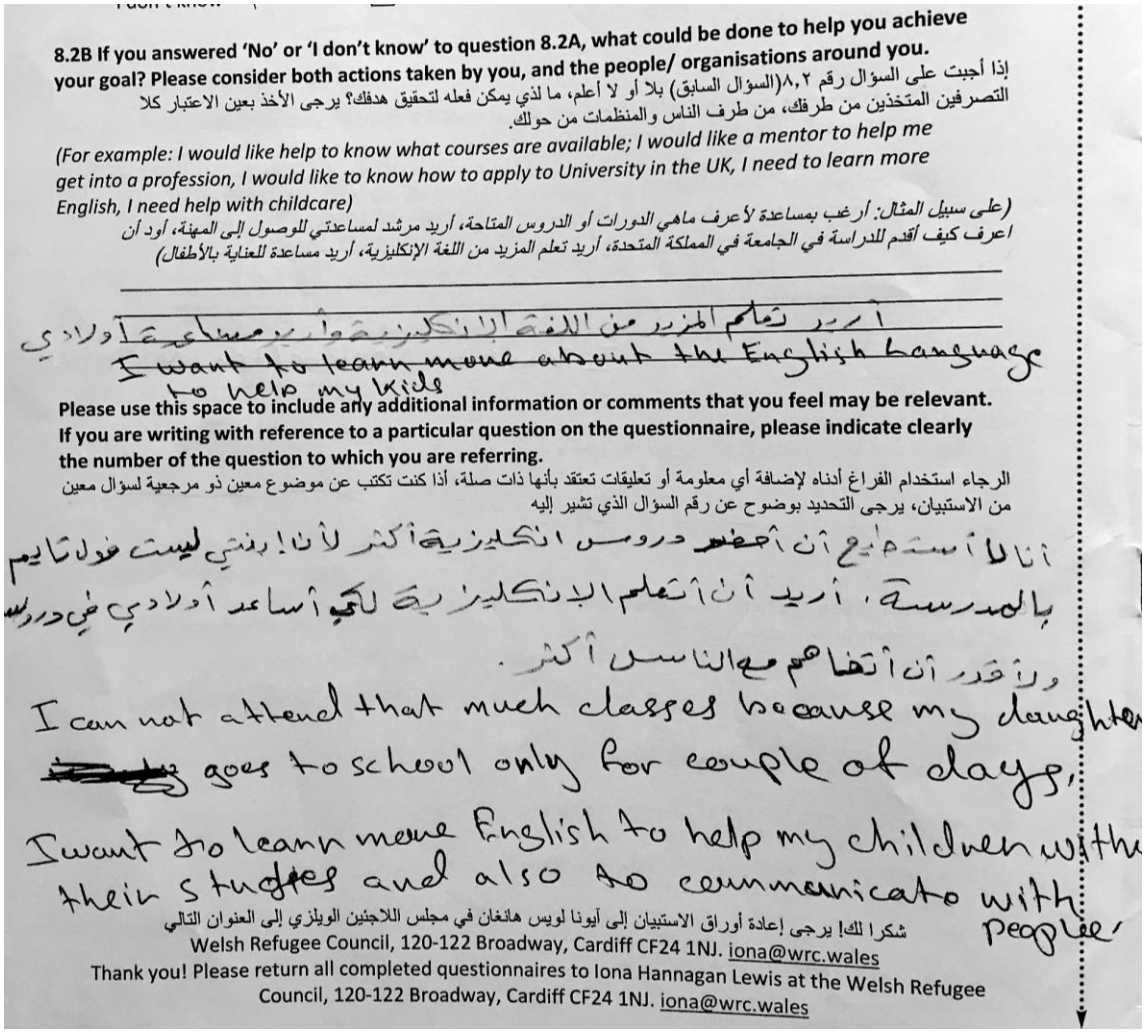
Female participants from case study area 5 highlighted the impact of a lack of childcare, as below:

1 [female voice speaks in Arabic]
2 Interpreter: She said that is the biggest thing that they are stuck in and they want to go on the bus and the bus driver ask them something and they want – they don't know how to reply
3 [female voice speaks in Arabic]
4 Interpreter: So yesterday somebody was talking to her whatever she was very [shrug shoulders, shake head]
5 but her daughter was helping her, her younger daughter to translate […]
6 [female voice speaks in Arabic]
7 Int: She like to talk with her neighbour as well but the language barrier […]
8 [Female voice speaks in Arabic]
9 Int: I haven't got opportunity to learn, I haven't got opportunity to learn that's what she's saying, haven't got opportunity to learn the language

(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

As the above excerpt shows, not only did a lack of childcare impact women's participation in language learning, but their ensuing low proficiency in English impacted their independence and mobility. The participant in question reported feeling 'stuck in', wanting to travel and use the bus, but unable to communicate with the driver. The participant relies on her younger daughter to translate for her, an experience which echoes Sajid Javid's experience of translating for his mother as a young boy, referred to in the first chapter of this thesis.

This experience of isolation is further captured in this excerpt from a questionnaire (below), in which a participant who cannot attend language classes due to a lack of childcare expresses her frustration at being unable to acquire sufficient language to help her children with their homework, or to communicate with people in her community (Figure 5.10, below):



8.2B If you answered 'No' or 'I don't know' to question 8.2A, what could be done to help you achieve your goal? Please consider both actions taken by you, and the people/ organisations around you.

إذا أجبت على السؤال رقم ٨,٢(السؤال السابق) بلا أو لا أعلم، ما لذي يمكن فعله لتحقيق هدفك؟ يرجى الأخذ بعين الاعتبار كلا التصرفين المتخذين من طرفك، من طرف الناس والمنظمات من حولك.

(For example: I would like help to know what courses are available; I would like a mentor to help me get into a profession, I would like to know how to apply to University in the UK, I need to learn more English, I need help with childcare)

(على سبيل المثال: أرغب بمساعدة لأعرف ماهي الدورات أو الدروس المتاحة، أريد مرشد لمساعدتي للوصول إلى المهنة، أود أن اعرف كيف أقدم للدراسة في الجامعة في المملكة المتحدة، أريد تعلم المزيد من اللغة الإنكليزية، أريد مساعدة للعناية بالأطفال)

أريد تعلم المزيد من اللغة الإنكليزية وأيضا مساعدة أولادي

I want to learn more about the English language to help my kids

Please use this space to include any additional information or comments that you feel may be relevant. If you are writing with reference to a particular question on the questionnaire, please indicate clearly the number of the question to which you are referring.

الرجاء استخدام الفراغ أدناه لإضافة أي معلومة أو تعليقات تعتقد بأنها ذات صلة، أذا كنت تكتب عن موضوع معين ذو مرجعية لسؤال معين من الاستبيان، يرجى التحديد بوضوح عن رقم السؤال الذي تشير إليه

أنا لا أستطيع أن أحضر دروس انكليزية أكثر لأن ابنتي ليست عندها يوم بالمدرسة، أريد أن أتعلم الإنكليزية لكي أساعد أولادي في دروس

وأريد أن أتفاهم مع الناس أكثر.

I can not attend that much classes because my daughter goes to school only for couple of days,

I want to learn more English to help my children with their studies and also to communicate with people.

شكرا لك! يرجى إعادة أوراق الاستبيان إلى آيونا لويس هانغان في مجلس اللاجئين الويلزي إلى العنوان التالي

Welsh Refugee Council, 120-122 Broadway, Cardiff CF24 1NJ. iona@wrc.wales

Thank you! Please return all completed questionnaires to Iona Hannagan Lewis at the Welsh Refugee Council, 120-122 Broadway, Cardiff CF24 1NJ. iona@wrc.wales

Figure 5.10: Photograph of page from a questionnaire. The Arabic translates as: "I want to learn more about the English language to help my kids/ I cannot attend that much classes because my daughter goes to school

only for a couple of days. I want to learn more English to help my children with their studies and also to communicate with people."

Case study area 5 was exceptional among the areas under study for not having secured adequate funds to support childcare for participants. However, among the case study areas that had secured funds towards this item, there was notable uncertainty about the sustainability of childcare provision once the VPRS funding had ceased. For example, in case study area 2 (the "larger county" with which respondents in case study area 5 were comparing themselves), the participants and reported a lack of certainty as to the future of available provision after one year of allocated childcare funds, as VPRS funds tapered following a year of resettlement.

1 IHL: Is there childcare? Is there childcare?
2 KA: Here in college?
3 IHL Yeah
4 [many voices]: No
[…]
5 Interpreter: No there is not, not in college no, no it's not it's only put them in private nurseries
6 IHL: So does- does private nurseries get paid by the council?
7 Int: Yep- yes
8 IHL So that means you can go to college?
9 Int: Yes
10 IHL: Good. Other areas=
11 Int: =sorry-
12 It's only for one year, yes?
13 FA: Yes
14 Int: Only for one year [from council]
15 IHL Ah, and then after you=
16 Int: =till now we don't know.
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 2)

A similar uncertainty about the future of funded childcare beyond the year was found in case study area 1, as in this excerpt with the local authority community learning co-ordinator ('VT'):

1 IHL: So beyond VPRS, will they have access to childcare as well?
2 VT: I don't know to be honest, I'm assuming that it is continuing
3 because they're still attending the ones that needed childcare
4 even though they're beyond the 12 months
5 so I'm assuming that the funding is still there.
(Excerpt from interview with 'VT' community learning commissioner, case study area 1)

However, as the community learning commissioner states, even those who were beyond the initial year of resettlement scheme funding were continuing to access both ESOL classes and the childcare necessary to facilitate access.

Similarly, in case study area 3, while funding for childcare was available, according to the area 3b community learning commissioner "it had to be bid for by the councils", and thus wasn't guaranteed. As such, in the area 3 focus group it transpired that the some of the women "in [case study area 3A] who should be able to attend [the local] college only have 1.5 hours a week [of classes]".

5.11 b) Local resources and travel

As indicated in section 5.10 b), geography and transport also played a role in determining how many hours of ESOL resettled refugees were able to access, and the cost to them of accessing classes. In areas which did not have a large range of ESOL provision in existence prior to VPRS, I found that refugees would frequently have to travel, sometimes to another local authority area, in order to access classes. This was the case in area 5, where the male learners were travelling to study at the college in area 2. In the below excerpt one participant from case study area 5 adds up the cost of travel for himself and his family:

1 AB: I give you example:
2 when coming to college we have to uh buy a weekly ticket
3 £14.50 and for one person
4 if we come with his wife uh £29 a week-weekly
5 and if they want to come as a family to [xxx] they have to pay as a family ticket £12 this will cost I'm sure more than £150 monthly, yeah?
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

While those resettled in area 3A were able to access up to 15 hours of ESOL per week at the local college, those in council B could only access up to 4.5 hours at the local community centre – despite the fact that provision at both venues was run by the same further education provider. When the issue was raised in the focus group, it transpired that, while caseworkers had requested for the refugees resettled in area B to be provided with bus passes, this had yet to happen:

1 Caseworker: She's been in talks the council have been in talks with [xxx] for over well since last September
2 and the reason is [they] only wants to fund quarterly season tickets uh
3 but unfortunately the bus company doesn't do season tickets.
4 Also [the council] only wants to allow travel in the area not the further area as well so it's hard to get that organised.
(Excerpt from focus group in case study area 3)

An interview with the college ESOL co-ordinator in area 3A highlighted the difficulty of meeting the needs of the refugees resettled in case study area 3B:

1 EC: […] the ESOL provision is here. They're talking about us giving them extra lessons but we are working full time.
2 When else do they want us to teach them?
3 Do they want us to go to their houses? They being the council.
4 Because our provision is here.
5 Traditionally, we've got classes on a Tuesday in [area 3B] because we haven't had as many students in [area 3B] as we have in [area 3A].
(Excerpt from interview with ESOL co-ordinator, further education provider, case study area 3)

As indicated in the above excerpt, in areas in which there are relatively low numbers of English language learners - as in case study area 3B – there were deemed to be insufficient numbers of ESOL learners to justify the commissioning of bespoke full-time language courses. The lack of learner numbers was also problematic in case study area 4, as in this excerpt from an interview with the co-ordinator of a voluntary English language teaching initiative (VT) and the VPRS co-ordinator, working in the local authority (RA):

1 VT: I think we do need 3 different levels, I think we have people of 3 different levels.
2 We have one class that are learning the alphabet from scratch,
3 but we've also got [ ] who is struggling to make the figures and do the alphabet. […]
4 I really think we do need the 3 classes.
5 RA: The only issue is that [national education provider] say they need 8 for a class […]
6 There are obviously people out there who need it.
(Excerpt from interview with voluntary organiser ('VT') and VPRS co-ordinator ('RA') case study area 4)

The excerpt from the interview with VT and RA brings in one of the key themes that have been running throughout this chapter – the issue of learner diversity. VT expresses the need for "3 different levels" to meet the needs of learners at a range of literacy and English language proficiency. Then, RA counters with the assertion that the county has insufficient numbers of learners to commission additional classes at a variety of levels from an education provider. This is an issue which echoes the interview with the ESOL commissioner in case study area 3, in which classes have not been commissioned because of a lack of learner numbers. Nevertheless, in a context in which resettled refugees are expected to access 8 hours of ESOL per week, and in which funding is available to this end, these arguments become increasingly untenable (Home Office 2018).

5.11 c) Welsh

Our research took place in Wales, a country in which there are two national languages, English and Welsh. It is therefore essential to address the topic of Welsh language learning among the VPRS participants. Within Wales, the Home Office has consented for VPRS funding to be used for Welsh language classes as well as (but not instead of) ESOL, where appropriate and desired by the participants themselves (Home Office 2018). None of the case study areas under study had used the budget to these ends at the time of research. Community learning managers tasked with commissioning language classes under VPRS cited a lack of interest in learning Welsh among refugee participants as the reason for the paucity of Welsh classes, as in this excerpt with 'WG':

1 I: are they able to access Welsh [classes]?
2 WG: Um they could because we have the Welsh for Adults Centre is run out of this department
3 also [VPRS local authority co-ordinator] did say that some of the funding [they've] got could be used for Welsh as well as but not instead of English
4 so I've passed that on to
5 if anybody is interested then we would obviously put on classes for them and that would go through
6 the Welsh for Adults tutor would arrange that
7 um we haven't had anybody particularly asking at the moment
(Excerpt from interview with 'WG', community learning manager, case study area 1)

Correspondingly, questionnaire data showed that while 32 participants indicated that they aspired to learn or improving their English, only one participant wanted to learn Welsh. Data on refugees' aspirations for their time in Wales are discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

This lack of desire to learn Welsh was also apparent in focus groups, in which questions related to participants' desire to learn Welsh were, in English-speaking majority areas, generally met with blank indifference, as in the below excerpt:

1 MA: I don't think anyone want to learn Welsh
2 IHL: No? Okay. So.. you want to learn Welsh?
3 MA: I don't think anyone want to learn Welsh

(Excerpt from focus group in case study area 1)

In a case study area in which the host community had a large proportion of speakers of Welsh, focus group participants engaged more with the subject of learning Welsh, yet emphasised the difficulty of learning two languages simultaneously, as in the below excerpt:

1 IHL: Are you learning Welsh?
2 SD: No-no Inglese yalla
3 IHL: English only?
4 SD: [Arabic]
5 Translator: He says it's hard, you can learn English, just few words
6 AL: We can say, bore da, sut dach chi.
7 RA: [Arabic]
8 Translator: She said, we'd like to learn the two languages, we find the difficulty in learning English and Welsh, that's what she's saying
9 IHL: is anyone going to any courses apart from English or Welsh?
10 RA: [Arabic]
11 Translator: No, she said they will English.

(Excerpt from focus group. Location omitted for anonymity)

Those accessing ESOL in two case study areas were offered Welsh classes, but there was insufficient take-up to justify commissioning bespoke classes:

1 CE: We offered the ESOL students Welsh classes but we didn't get the numbers
(Excerpt from interview with ESOL co-ordinator. Location omitted for anonymity)

However, the ESOL co-ordinator at the further education college in area 2 (which also serviced area 5) was keen to emphasise that Welsh language skills were integrated into the ESOL classes of those accessing language learning in their establishment as part of the Curriculum Cymreig. The Curriculum Cymreig is the Common Requirement for the National Curriculum in Wales. As part of the Curriculum Cymreig, schools are required to embed learning related to Wales in its curriculum, practice, and ethos. The Curriculum Cymreig is deliberately designed to be pluralistic and diverse, so that it is up to different schools how it is embedded. Generally, some elements of Welsh Language learning are embedded as part of the Curriculum Cymreig (ACCAC 2003: 2-3).

Despite low rates of participation in Welsh language learning, there is some evidence to suggest that a lack of Welsh language proficiency may be a barrier to employment for participants. This is explored further in chapter 6.

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, though refugees have been resettled across Wales on the same resettlement scheme, there is a wide disparity in the quality and quantity of formal ESOL instruction that VPRS participants have been able to access nationally. Satisfaction in ESOL provision has been highest in an area 2, in which responsibility for language teaching has been assumed by a further education college which had ESOL provision in existence at a range of levels prior to the resettlement of refugees under VPRS. Furthermore, case study area 2 was, at the time of study, successful in securing funds to cover the cost of childcare, although there was concern as to the sustainability of this funding. In other case study areas, focus groups with refugee participants revealed considerable dissatisfaction both with the number of hours available, and with the fact that classes were mixed- ability. Further questioning revealed different reasons for this paucity of appropriate classes. In some cases, more classes were available, but structural barriers such childcare, location and the cost of transportation meant that

learners were unable to access them. In case study areas 3 and 4, low numbers of second language speakers of English meant that education commissioners felt there was insufficient demand for ESOL to resource full-time provision at a range of levels. Interviews with ESOL and resettlement scheme co-ordinators revealed the difficulty of ensuring adequate ESOL provision for VPRS participants across Wales, despite the £10m fund made available by the Home Office for VPRS. I also found that there was little motivation in either the questionnaire sample or the focus groups participants to learn Welsh, despite VPRS participants recognising that had been resettled into a country with two official languages.

CHAPTER SIX: EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING

This chapter presents data relating to employment and training. It will begin by presenting data on refugee participants' reported education and employment histories, experiences of employment in the United Kingdom, and aspirations for employment in Wales and the United Kingdom. It will then go on to analyse the barriers to employment for refugee participants of this study and critique the labour conditions under which some refugees have been employed.

6.1 Questionnaire data

a) Employment history

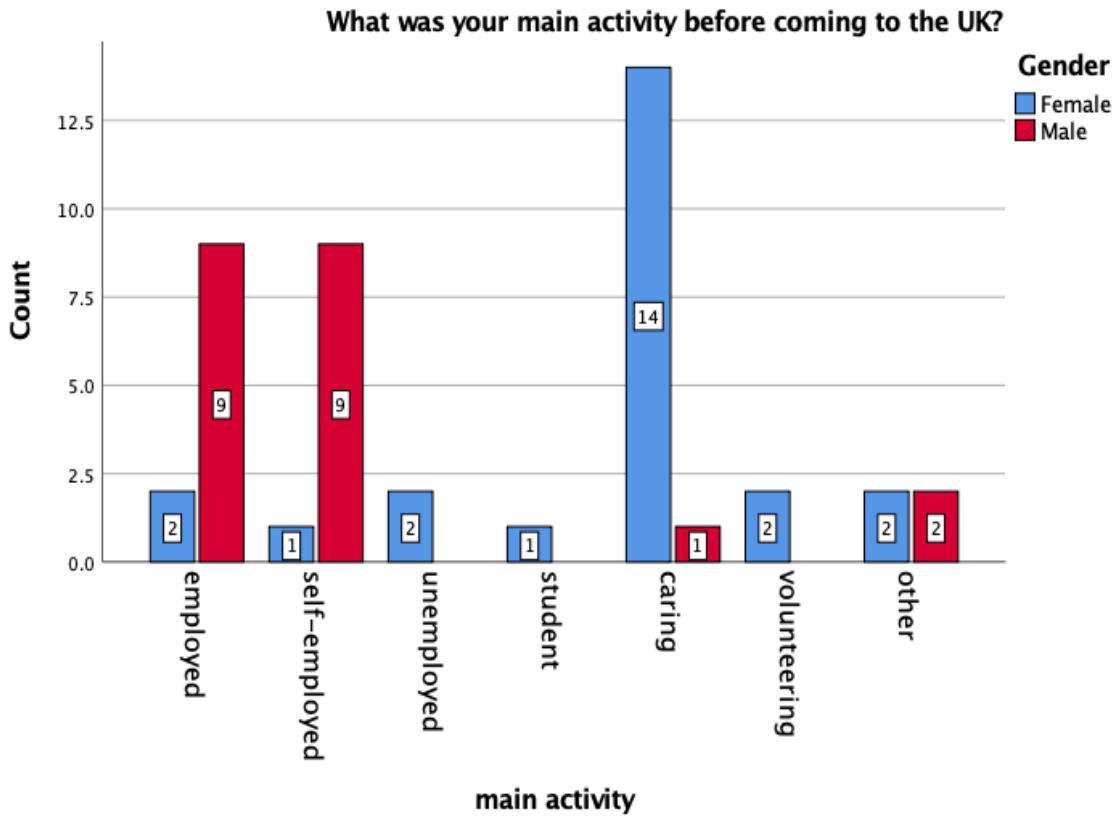


Figure 6.1: bar chart showing questionnaire participants' responses to the question, 'What was your main activity before coming to the UK? Tick one'. The results have been separated by gender.

Questionnaire participants were asked 'What was your main activity before coming to the UK? Tick one.' 45 people responded to this question. The blue bars of figure 6.1 represent female respondents, while the red represent male respondents. As figures 6.1 and 6.2 show, the majority of male questionnaire respondents were either

employed or self-employed prior to travelling to the United Kingdom. While a sizeable minority of 8 women were engaged in education, employment, or volunteering prior to coming to the UK - the majority (14) were engaged in caring responsibilities ('looking after the home and family').

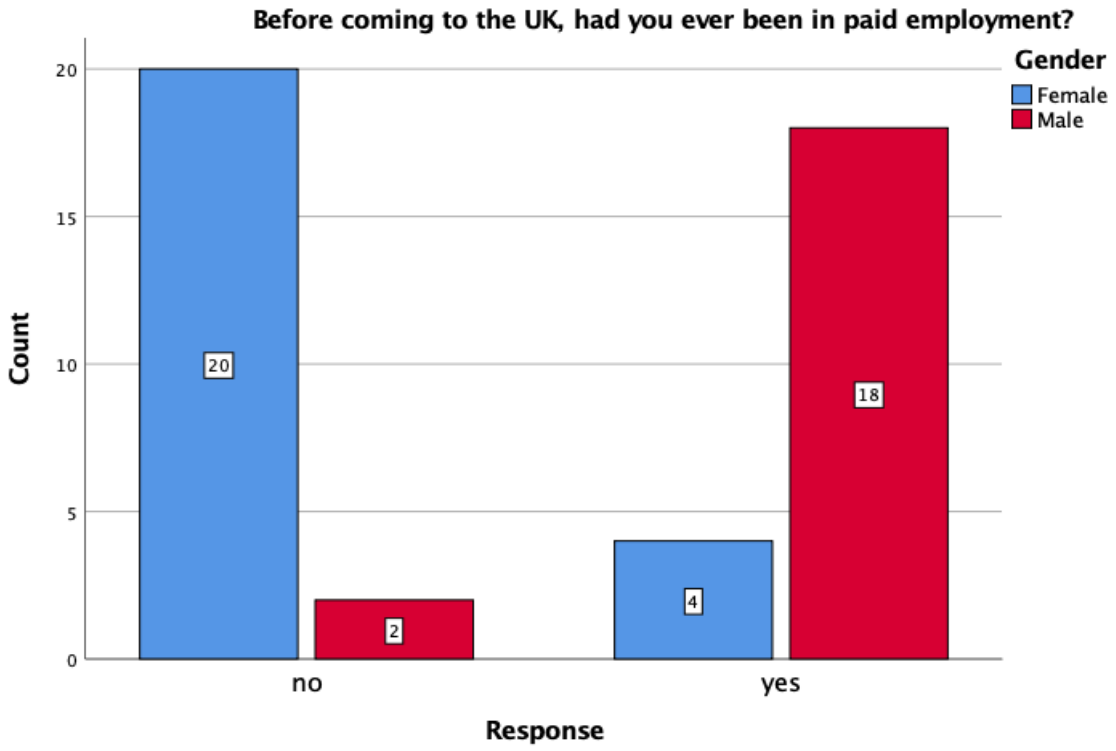


Figure 6.2: bar chart indicating frequency of responses to the question 'Had you ever been in paid employment/ self-employment prior to coming to the United Kingdom?' Results separated by gender.

44 people responded to the question 'Had you ever been in paid employment/ self-employment prior to coming to the United Kingdom?', 20 women reported that they had not been in paid employment, while 4 had. By contrast, 18 men had been in paid employment/ self-employment, while 2 had not. This is shown in Figure 6.2 (above). Of those 2 men who had not, both fell within the 16-24 age category.

Types of employment varied between respondents. Sectors represented in the sample included skilled labour (plumbing, stonemasonry, building, gardening); production (factory work, welding); business (shop owners and keepers), and professional work (teaching and architecture). 4 women and 18 men had been

employed prior to resettlement, while 20 women and 2 men indicated that they had not been employed prior to coming to the UK.

b) Qualifications and prior education

Questionnaire respondents were asked to select all the levels of education they had attended from the following list: Primary (basic school education); Secondary (advanced school education); Further (college level education); or Higher (University education). 44 people responded to this question. Out of these, all stated that they had attended primary level education. 25 respondents attended secondary level education; 7 respondents had attended further education, and 6 respondents had attended higher education. The data were then further analysed according to the gender of participants, in order to ascertain whether there was a difference between genders in terms of level of educational attainment.

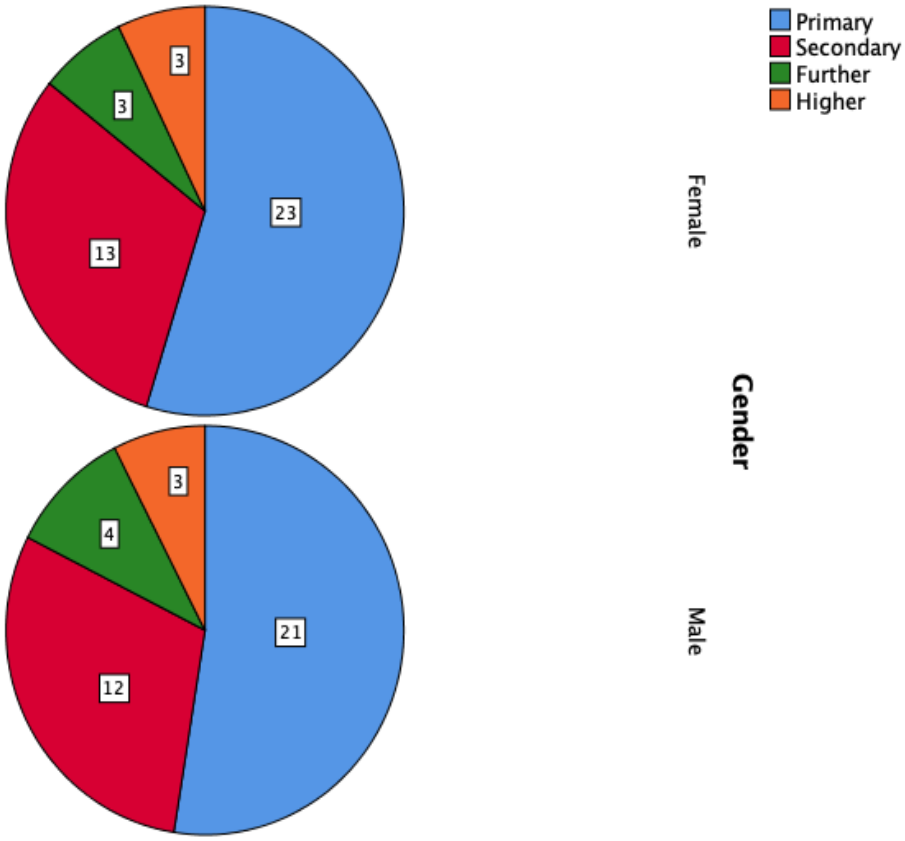


Figure 6.3: pie charts demonstrating frequencies of responses to the question 'What levels of education have you completed? Tick all that apply.' Data separated by gender.

As Figure 6.3 shows, there was little difference in the level of educational attainment between genders, with similar numbers of men and women accessing education from primary to University-level education.

41 people responded to the question 'Did you gain a qualification (certificate) from your studies before coming to the UK?' Of these, 14 questionnaire respondents report having gained qualifications from their studies, while 27 did not. Furthermore, only 6 respondents answered yes to the question 'Do you have your certificates with you in Wales?', while 31 answered no.

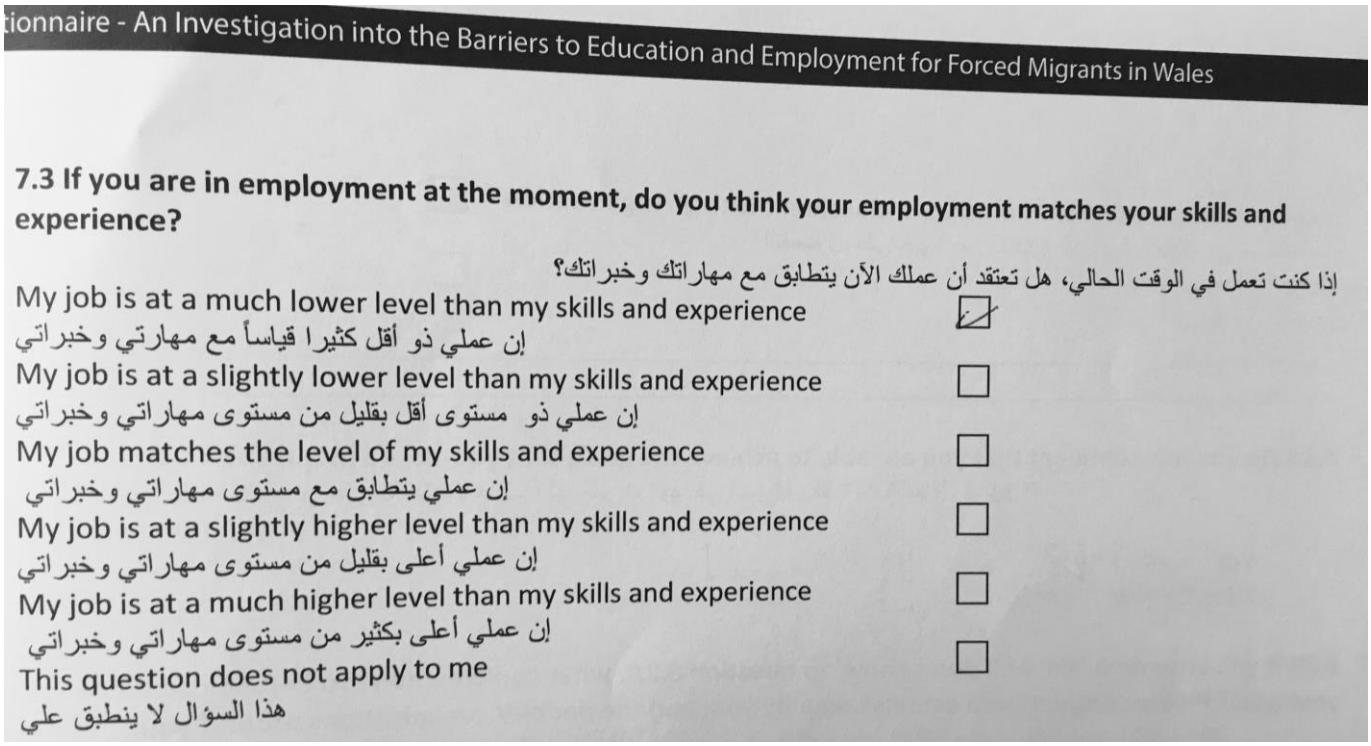
This latter point is significant. While the lack of recognition by UK employers of qualifications obtained overseas has been noted as a barrier to refugee employment in Wales (Crawley 2013), responses to the questions on certificates demonstrate a different barrier. Refugees resettled in Wales may have accessed varying levels of education, however many have never obtained certificates to evidence their educational achievement. Any qualifications gained may have been lost, destroyed, or otherwise be unobtainable. Thus, the issue is more complex than a need for employers to recognise overseas qualifications - a process made simpler by organisations such as the UK National Agency for the Recognition of International Certificates (UKNARIC)[1]. Rather, it is an issue of recognising the skills and achievements of those who may not hold tangible evidence of their prior experience. The issue of recognition of prior learning and skills is discussed further in chapter 7.

c) Current employment

Of all those who responded to the questionnaire, only 1 participant reported being currently employed. The rest of the sample either did not respond to the question relating to current employment, or ticked 'This question does not apply to me'. As figure 6.4 (below) shows, the participant considered themselves to be employed in a job much lower than their level of skill and experience. The

[1] UKNARIC is the "designated United Kingdom national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills." For more information: (https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/)

participant' answers to other questions in the questionnaire indicated that he was male, had attained a primary level of education, had worked as a welder, and had obtained no qualifications from his studies prior to coming to the UK. He reported that he could read and write with a score of 5 ('fluently') in Arabic (his first language). He gave himself a score of 2 ('a little') across the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in English. In response to the question, 'If you have not been able to find employment which matches your skills and experience, can you tell us why you think this might be?' the participant responded: "do not have the right qualifications".


tionnaire - An Investigation into the Barriers to Education and Employment for Forced Migrants in Wales

7.3 If you are in employment at the moment, do you think your employment matches your skills and experience?

إذا كنت تعمل في الوقت الحالي، هل تعتقد أن عملك الآن يتطابق مع مهاراتك وخبراتك؟

My job is at a much lower level than my skills and experience ☑
إن عملي ذو أقل كثيرا قياساً مع مهارتي وخبراتي

My job is at a slightly lower level than my skills and experience ☐
إن عملي ذو مستوى أقل بقليل من مستوى مهاراتي وخبراتي

My job matches the level of my skills and experience ☐
إن عملي يتطابق مع مستوى مهاراتي وخبراتي

My job is at a slightly higher level than my skills and experience ☐
إن عملي أعلى بقليل من مستوى مهاراتي وخبراتي

My job is at a much higher level than my skills and experience ☐
إن عملي أعلى بكثير من مستوى مهاراتي وخبراتي

This question does not apply to me ☐
هذا السؤال لا ينطبق علي

Figure 6.4: image of questionnaire response.

During focus groups, one participant stated that they were currently in employment. When asked in what capacity the participant was employed, they responded that they worked in a takeaway. The issue of the quality of employment and 'fair work' is further discussed in chapter 7 of this chapter.

d) Aspiration

The questionnaire gathered data on participants' aspirations for life in Wales. Participants were asked "What would you like to do while you are Wales/ the UK? Tick as many as you wish." They were offered a choice of the following statements, and asked to tick all that applied:

- To get any job
- To get a job that matches my skills and experiences
- To learn/ improve my English through English classes
- To learn/ improve my Welsh through Welsh classes
- To undertake further study or training to improve my skills
- To study at University/ Higher Education level
- To volunteer with an organisation
- To gain work experience/ internship/ a placement with an organisation
- Other (please specify)

Responses to this question (labelled "Aspiration") have been compiled and are presented in the pie chart of Figure 6.5 (below). Readers should note that, in order to represent the data more clearly, the categories of "To undertake further study or training to improve my skills" and 'To study at University/ Higher Education level" have been amalgamated into the broad category "To go to HE/ undertake further training" (represented in yellow on the pie chart). Similarly, the category of "To volunteer with an organisation" has been amalgamated with "To gain work experience/ internship/ a placement with an organisation" to create "To volunteer/ intern/ gain work experience", represented in teal on the pie chart. In both instances, it was felt that the sub-categories were too similar, and levels of response too small to meaningfully differentiate between the two in data analysis.

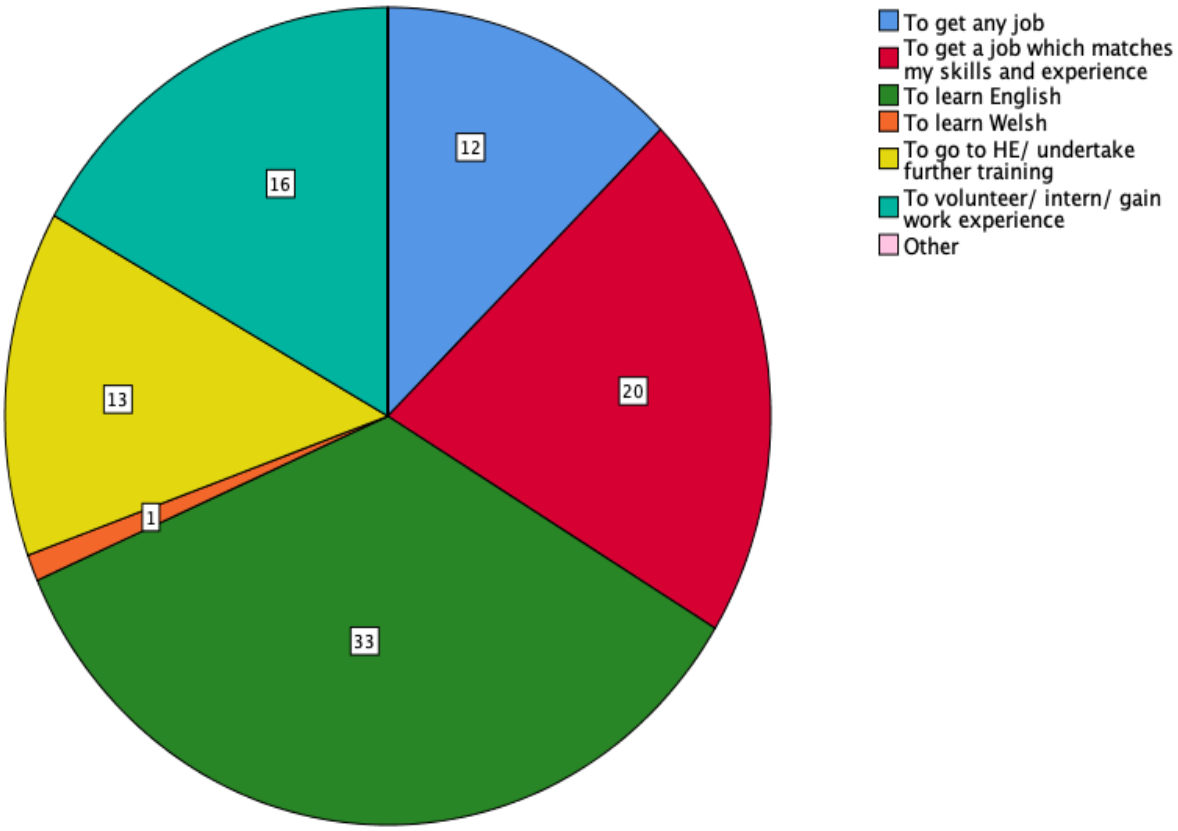


Figure 6.5: pie chart indicating frequency of responses to the question 'What would you like to do while you are in Wales/ the UK? Tick as many as you wish'

43 people responded to this question. As shown in Figure 6.5, 33 out of 43 respondents indicated that they wished to learn English. 20 respondents wished to get a job which matched their skills and experiences; 16 wished to volunteer/ intern/ gain work experience; 14 wished to progress to Higher Education/ undertake further training; 12 wished to get any job (regardless of its level of skill or experience), and only 1 respondent wished to learn Welsh. Figure 6.6 (below) shows the results for this dataset, separated by gender.

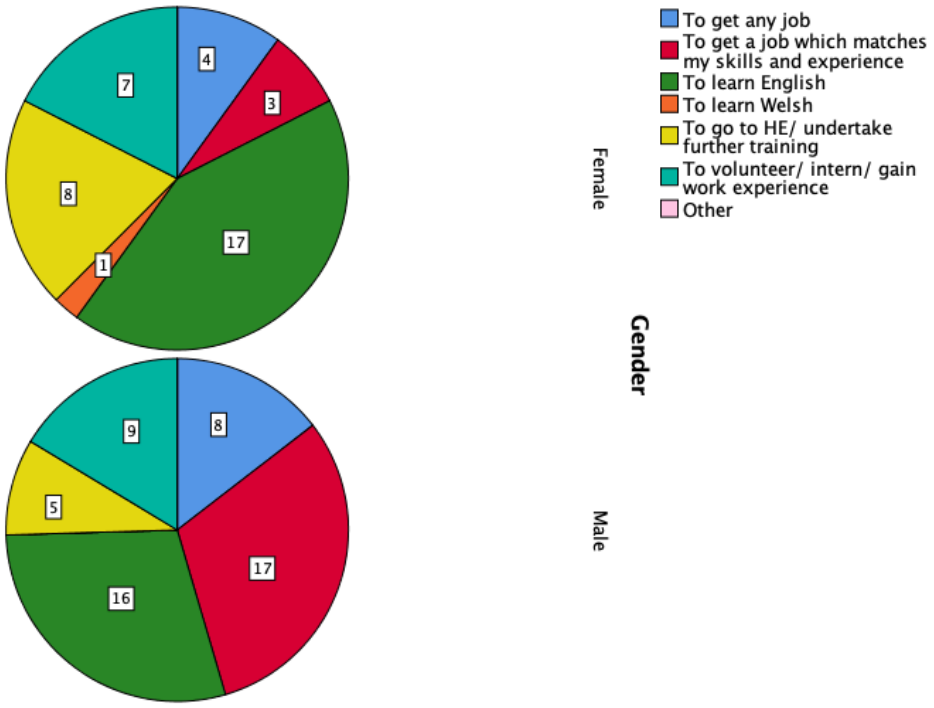


Figure 6.6: pie charts indicating responses to the question 'What would you like to do in Wales? Tick all that apply.' Data separated by gender.

As Figure 6.6 shows, similar numbers of men and women reported that they would like to learn English. More men than women reported that they would like to get any job, to get a job matching their levels of skill and experience, and to volunteer or gain work experience. However some female respondents nevertheless expressed the wish to get a job and gain work experience, and more women than men expressed a desire to undertake further training/ progress to Higher Education. The barriers to employment are discussed in the next section.

6.2 Barriers to Employment

a) 'Language barrier'

Low proficiency in English was by far the most oft-cited barrier to securing employment across the sample. Reference to the existence of a 'language barrier' to employment was observed throughout the dataset, including the questionnaire responses, in focus groups with refugee participants, and in interviews. The examples are too numerous to all be listed, however a selection is presented below.

Responses to question 7.3A ('If you have not been able to find employment at a level which matches your skills and experience, can you tell us why you think this might be?) included:

1. I need to study the language first to complete my higher education and find a job.
2. I do not have qualifications and I need to look after my children and also my language is not that good to help me to get a job.
3. I still studying ESOL to improve English language. I have to speak Welsh as well to be able to teach.
4. I do not speak English very well.

One refugee participant, Ali, elaborated:

> My CV is on lots of website on the internet, and I receive hundreds of emails daily, and I do apply for the majority of them no matter where they are or how much they offer, but always the answer from the vast majority of them is an excuse because I don't speak a really good English, also I have attended to too many job's interviews in [xxx], and the majority of them has rejected me because my English level even if I have all the requirements and the experience required
> (Excerpt from written testimonial)

The concept of a 'language barrier' to employment was also referred to in interviews with caseworkers, education co-ordinators, and employment advisors tasked with supporting refugee participants' integration. Some excerpts are reproduced below.

1 BD: Mae yna gymaint o'r bobl hyn sydd eisiau gwaith,
2 a pe bawn ni 'di llwyddo dod o hyd i swydd iddynt erbyn hyn, baswn ni 'di neud
3 oherwydd mae digon o sgiliau ganddynt.
4 'Dan ni 'di delio gyda sawl cyflogydd,
5 ni 'di gofyn os allen nhw ymuno a'r gwaith ond mae'r cyflogyddion 'di gwrthod
6 achos inswrans a iechyd a diogelwch.
7 Felly, y ffordd 'da ni'n edrych are eu holau, Saesneg yw'r unig rhwystr.

1 BD: There are so many of these people that are desperate for work,
2 and if we could have got them a job by now we would have
3 because the skills are there.
4 We've dealt with different employers,
5 we've asked if they can go into that work but the employers won't
6 because of insurance and health and safety.
7 So the way we are looking after them is that English is their only barrier.

(Excerpt from interview with employment advisor, 'BD', case study area 3)

1 Interviewer: What's stopping him getting a job as a plasterer tomorrow?
2 RT: The language.

(Excerpt from interview with employment advisor, 'RT', case study area 4)

Not only do these excerpts frame language proficiency as *a* barrier to employment, but *the* primary barrier to employment. As Ali writes, in response to his applications for work, "*always* the answer [xxx] is an excuse*"* because he doesn't speak "a very good English". According to the employment advisor in case study area 3, the way the refugees are being looked after means that English can be their "*only* barrier" to employment. These excerpts were fairly representative across the dataset - in questionnaire/ interview responses where English was framed as a barrier to employment, it was typically framed as the most significant barrier.

Once interview participants were probed as to why a lack of (typically, English) language proficiency was a barrier to employment, the most frequently-cited reason

was that poor English language proficiency would pose a health and safety risk in the workplace, as in the below excerpts:

> 1 JA: [Mae] nifer o bobl yn da iawn yn ymarferol, gyda'i ddwylo,
> 2 a mae nhw'n cyrraedd gyda sgiliau proffesiynnol tebyg,
> 3 ond dyw eu lefelau Saesneg dim yn barod ar gyfer yr elfen iechyd a diogelwch.
> *1 JA: [There's] quite a few people who are really practically good with their hands*
> *2 and they- that's the profession they come with*
> *3 whereas when it comes to health and safety English isn't ready for that.*
> (Excerpt from interview with resettlement co-ordinator, 'JA' case study area 3)

> 1 PO: Amazon came back with a straight no when the jobcentre approached them because of the English.
> 2 And it's because of health and safety, not that they can't do the job.
> 3 Amazon would have put on a bus to get there and back, the wage was really good.
> 4 Hard work but they are hard workers.
> 5 EW: It seems to always boil down to this one factor, the level of English
> (Excerpt with resettlement co-ordinator ('PO') and volunteer ('EW') case study area 4)

High proficiency in English was sometimes posited as a gateway to opportunity:

> 1 ET: Pe bawn ni'n medru'i dangos y ffordd, dwi'n gwybod fedri nhw cyflawni pethe anhygoel
> 2 chi'mbo fel cyflogadwyedd dwi'n gwybod fedri nhw gwneud,
> 3 ond yn anffodus mae'r diffyg Saesneg yn eu rhwystro nhw ond gallen nhw gwneud!
> 4 Pan fo'ch Saesneg yn dda, mae cyfle ar gael.
>
> *1 ET: If we could push them in the right direction I know they can achieve amazing things you know*
> *2 like employability, I know they can do it*
> *3 but unfortunately a lack of English is preventing them but they can do it! […]*
> *4 once your English is good, opportunity available.*
>
> (Excerpt from interview with caseworker ('ET'), case study area 1)

The common theme that spans these utterances is that of 'English first' – the notion being that refugee participants must improve their English language, first and foremost, prior to further achievement. Then, once a certain level of English language proficiency

has been achieved, 'opportunity' will follow in the guise of training, employment, and material wealth. As one education co-ordinator put it:

1 CM: Y peth yw -Saesneg yn gyntaf,
2 a wedyn ar ôl y Saesneg mi ddaw gwaith,
3 ac o'r gwaith mi ddaw arian, a cheir, a phopeth arall.

1 CM: It's about English first
2 then after English it's work
3 and then that's where money will come and cars and everything else.
(Excerpt from interview with education provider ('CM') case study area 1)

b) Access to appropriate advice and guidance

Refugee participants reported a mixed picture in terms of the advice and guidance they were receiving to support their searches for employment. In some areas, refugees reported that 'no one' was offering advice on how to find employment in Wales, as in the below excerpts from focus groups with refugee study participants:

1 IHL: Who do you feel here in [case study area] is helping you to find work?
2 EE: Unfortunately, nobody
3 MR: Nobody
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 2)

1 MC: After the language,
2 does he know what qualifications and certificates he needs
3 to work in the UK?
4 Interpreter: No, he doesn't know.
5 MC: Does he know who to ask or where to go?
6 Int: No.
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 4)

In some cases, refugee participants reported that access to further support was withheld until they (the refugees) had 'improved' their English language proficiency, as in the below excerpts:

1 IHL: Who gives [you] advice about where to get a job or what courses?
2 AD: Uh – no one

[…]
3 IHL: when you go to the [employment service, what] do they say
[…]
4 AD: Yes they – you have to learn English, you must to learn English
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

One participant, who had worked as a driver for a fast-food restaurant, claimed that the he had initially been denied access to a support scheme to finance the cost of a drivers' licence on the basis that he had low proficiency in English:

1 NA: But they told me we can't pay for theory test because your language is not very good,
2 you must study language before that.
3 When your language is better we can pay for theory test.
(Excerpt from interview with refugee participant, case study area 3)

There was general agreement among refugee participants, employment advisors, and resettlement scheme co-ordinators that refugee employment outcomes would be improved by their achieving a 'higher' level of English proficiency. However there was a notable lack of clarity as to what constituted a 'high', or 'employment-ready' level of English. Furthermore, there was little evidence that screening or diagnostic assessment of linguistic proficiency were being used in, or to inform, employment-advisory encounters. In certain cases, work coaches (in both statutory and third-sector employability organisations) appeared to hold responsibility for deciding when a refugees' level of language was sufficient to be recommended for employment and training. In these cases, advisors were relying on their own judgements, as well as the opinions of caseworkers and interpreters to ascertain refugees' linguistic proficiency. There was no evidence of caseworkers and interpreters having received training or using existing diagnostic assessment models to determine language skills (Abedi 2008).

1 MC: Mentioned in the meeting was that [advisory staff] are responsible for deciding when [refugees'] English is ready
2 but how equipped are they to know when this is the case?
3 JM: We are not language teachers.
4 We have a conversation with somebody and that conversation then drives the fact of whether that conversation was at a level

5 We have a conversation with the interpreter and [the caseworkers].
6 Once a month we ask an interpreter to come in to see if we can have a bit more of a conversation.

(Excerpt from interview with branch manager ('JM') statutory employment service – case study area 3)

This finding resonates with that of that of a study by Schellekens (2001), commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment to determine whether people whose first language is not English face barriers to the labour market. Careers advisers interviewed for the study found that:

> like other clients, second language speakers needed independent advice and clear information on career paths. They were asked how far language skills played a part in careers advice. They replied that it was an essential component but that they did not have the tools for language assessment nor that it was their role to carry it out.
> (Schellekens 2001: 29)

Advisors' lack of information regarding refugees' levels of English language proficiency reflected a general lack of a systematic approach to gathering information regarding refugee skills within VPRS. Across the five case study areas, this study noted that there was no clear indication as to who was responsible for collecting data on refugees' prior education, employment and skills. One interviewee, branch manager for a statutory employment service, described this lack of information as a barrier to providing refugees with appropriate employability advice:

1 MC: What, if anything, would you describe as the barriers to setting up what we've talked about –
2 getting the refugees in here with an exact description of what they want to do and what their skills are?
3 NY-E: It needs a collection agent,
4 somebody to collect that data on the basis of someone who is closer to the families and individuals.

(Excerpt from interview with branch manager ('NY-E'), statutory employment service)

In other case study areas it transpired that, where this information had been collected, it had been on an individual basis – that is, collected for individuals by advisors acting from their own initiative, as in the below excerpts:

> 1 IHL: Do you know if anyone has been gathering information on the skills or qualifications that people may have had prior to coming to the UK?
> 2 WT: The council have done a little bit we've got to know individuals
> 3 *we haven't done it as a mass thing*
> (Excerpt from interview with work coach ('WT'), case study area 2)

> 1 IHL: When the families come over are you getting information on their skills and experiences and prior employment?
> 2 IB: Not yet.
> 3 We're talking to [a third-sector organisation, they] should collect that
> 4 TM: that is discussed when we start a new claim
> (Excerpt from interview with two work coaches ('IB' and 'TM'), case study area 1)

However, there was little indication from resettlement co-ordinators of the systematic collection of data regarding refugees' employment histories and skills as part of the resettlement scheme. As shown in the below excerpt from an interview with the co-ordinator of VPRS in case study area 1, information on refugees' employment histories and skills was not gathered as part of refugee participants' case notes:

> 1 IHL: Oes 'na rhywun yn casglu gwybodaeth ar sgiliau['r ffoaduriaid], eu cyflogaeth, a'u haddysg, ac yn rhannu'r gwybodaeth gyda'r [gwasanaeth byd gwaith]?
> 2 TG: Dwi'm yn siwr.
> 3 Chm'bo, dwi'm di bod yn ei gasglu na'i gynnwys yn eu cofnodion achos,
> 4 felly i fi yr ateb yw na,
> 5 ond dwi'n meddwl gyda'r cyfiethydd wedyn falle mae hynny'n digwydd trwy'r [gwasanaeth byd gwaith]
> 6 ie ond dwi'm yn gwybod yn bendant fel mae hynny'n digwydd i ddeud y gwir
> 7 oherwydd dwi'm yn fynychu pob un sesiwn
> 8 felly fedra'i ddim deud

> *1 IHL: Is anyone collecting information on [refugees'] prior experience and skills and handing that over say to the [employment advisory services]?*

2 TG: I'm not sure on that.
3 I mean in terms of collecting it I haven't been passing over information from their casenotes
4 so for me that's a no
5 but I think through the interpreter then there may well be doing that themselves with [the statutory employment services]
6 yeah but I don't really know for sure exactly how that's done to be honest
7 because I'm not attending all of those sessions
8 so I can't say
(Excerpt from interview with VPRS co-ordinator ('TG'), case study area 1)

One resettlement scheme co-ordinator reported that they had questioned who held responsibility to support resettled refugees into employment:

1 DW: This is the question I've asked time and again,
2 to get them into work whose responsibility is it?
3 That's why I've got an idea of a project where we take someone on full time to work in the jobcentre,
4 working with the refugees to help them sign on,
5 making sure they attend ESOL classes.
6 They'd be like a mentor, working with them to help them find work, they'd approach companies, get them onto courses.
7 That's what I've got in mind
(Excerpt from interview with VPRS co-ordinator ('DW'), case study area 4)

The general implication from the above interview excerpts is that, across case study areas, there is a general lack of clarity as to which person or service is responsible for supporting refugees to access education and employment.

c) Gender

The research found qualitative evidence to suggest that, on the whole, it was the men among the refugee sample who were the primary benefits claimants:

> 1 IHL: in the job – do you go to the Jobcentre?
> 2 AD: No, the women don't.
> (Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

> 1 IHL: Are any of the women themselves claiming [benefits]?
> 2 RW: No
> 3 IHL: Or is it all through the men?
> 4 RW: It's all through the men.
> 5 The only female that we have claiming in her own right is
> 6 the grown-up daughter of one of the families
> 7 and she's on [employment support allowance]
> 8 because she had a kidney replaced
> (Excerpt from interview with work coach ('RW'). Location details omitted for anonymity.)

As a result, male refugees tended to have more access than women to employment advice and support:

> 1 MF: mae'r gwithwyr achos wedi bod yn gwneud llawer a'r tadau
> 2 helpu gyda CVs a wedyn eu hybu i fynychu nifer o bethau,
> eu annog nhw i wirfoddoli

> *1 MF: the caseworkers have been doing a lot with the Dads*
> *2 around CVs and getting them to attend different things,*
> *3 encouraging them into volunteering.*
> (Excerpt from interview with resettlement co-ordinator, case study area 3)

One reason for the emphasis on men's labour-market potential may be that, among the refugee sample, more men than women were in employment prior to resettlement, as indicated in Figures 6.1 and 6.2.

Furthermore, there was a general perception among caseworkers, work coaches, community education commissioners and resettlement scheme co-ordinators, that the men among the refugee populations had greater aspirations towards labour market activity than the women, as in the following excerpts:

1 DF: One of the issues to emerge […] is that they [refugees] are skilled work*men*,
2 but they don't know what to do to become qualified in their areas in the UK
3 and they don't know who can help them.
(Excerpt from interview with employment service branch manager ('DF'), case study area 4. Italics my own.)

1 FT: dwi'n meddwl bod y ffaith ein bod yn disgwyl i'r menywod hefyd chwilio am waith
2 yn dipyn o sioc iddynt [y ffoaduriaid] hefyd.

1 FT: I think that expectation for the women to be looking for work
2 is a bit of a shock for [refugees] as well.
(Excerpt from interview with education co-ordinator ('FT'), case study area 1)

Nevertheless, as shown in figure 6.5, a significant minority of women from the refugee group do aspire to participate in education and employment-related activity while in Wales. 4 women indicated they wished to get 'any job', 3 wish to get a job which matched their level of skill and experience, 8 wanted to undertake training, and 7 aspired to gain voluntary or work experience within an organisation. These responses show – when taken alongside the qualitative evidence shown above – that some women in the refugee sample may not be in receipt of employment advice via statutory employment services, despite having ambitions to gain employment, experience, or further training in Wales.

d) <u>Welsh</u>

The research collected some qualitative evidence to suggest that a lack of proficiency in the Welsh language was a barrier to employment for refugees in Welsh speaking-majority areas – particularly those who were seeking employment in the education sector. This is evidenced in the below excerpts with two refugees, Maher and Arafa, both of whom have prior employment experience as teachers:

1 Arafa: For me because they ask me always about Welsh especially I work-
2 because I plan to work as support in primary school
3 they said 'you need Welsh'

but maybe next year I plan to make teaching support course to help me maybe in here college
IHL: Yeah, are you learning Welsh?
[many voices] no
OR: we know some vocabulary sut da'chi? Diolch yn fawr.
In the bus only I heard=
Arafa: =little welsh

(Excerpt from focus group. Details of location omitted for anonymity)

IHL: and then what happened after you made a CV with [employment service]?
Maher: They told me tell us if you find job
I told them I'm teacher
so they told me you should be able to learn Welsh and English as well
it's hard for me so because the school here should be with Welsh and English

(Excerpt from focus group. Details of location omitted for anonymity)

In the case of the second excerpt, Maher had been advised to seek work as a cleaner instead of looking for teaching roles. As his wife Rawan explains:

Rawan: Sometimes [employment services] find job but not-
my husband for example he find it not suitable
because he used to work as a teacher for long time
not as for example cleaner
IHL: And so the jobs they are finding are=
Maher: =[Statutory employment services] told me if you want to work like cleaner
so I told them I can't because I didn't work [as a cleaner] before then

(Excerpt from focus group. Location omitted for anonymity)

Maher and Arafa's experiences were unusual among the refugee sample – no other refugee participants cited the Welsh language as a barrier to employment. However, Maher and Arafa themselves were not representative of the wider sample, in that they both had a high level of English language proficiency, had been educated to University level, and were the only participants actively looking for professional roles in the public/ education sectors. Both Maher and Arafa were resettled in Welsh-speaking majority areas. More research would be required to ascertain whether the Welsh language operates as a barrier to professional employment in other areas of Wales.

On the point of professional employment, researchers have noted that refugees are frequently under-employed. That is to say, they are employed in roles well below their level of skill, or which make insufficient use of their skills (Crawley 2013; Bloch 2002). Maher's experience (above) demonstrates how barriers such as language are constructed in advisory encounters, resulting in refugees being encouraged to actively pursue employment at a level not commensurate to their level of skill and experience. I will return to this point in Chapter 7.

Regional availability of training and employment

Work coaches interviewed for the study reported that access to qualifications and training was an important factor in ensuring refugee access to employment. While some refugees had accessed education and obtained qualifications prior to resettlement, these qualifications were not necessarily valid in a UK context. As one work coach put it:

1 OR: We have come across that an awful lot of the qualifications they would
2 need to resit an English version or a UK version before they became acceptable.
(Excerpt from interview with work coach ('OR'), case study area 2)

However, training which would support refugee skills development was generally not available in the areas into which our refugee sample had been resettled. One focus group participant revealed that they were intending to travel to Manchester to pursue a free course in coding, specifically for refugees and asylum seekers:

1 MD: I'm trying to follow courses in Manchester
2 this organised by NGO organisation to help refugee and asylum
3 this course is about web developers yeah
4 it's not started yet
5 and we are preparing to do official course um to take time
6 in six months so we have to go weekly one time in Manchester
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

Furthermore, it was noted that some refugees would rather be in employment or pursuing vocational courses than learning English. However almost all areas there was a notable lack of vocational courses which would be appropriate for those with low proficiency in English. This lack was noted by resettlement scheme co-ordinators. This was reflected in focus group conversations, where some participants viewed working as a better way than ESOL classes to gain English language skills:

1 Interpreter: They say if they work help them to learn English […]
2 Uh she say she know someone he don't study but he go to have work
3 and he never studied but his English now is very improved
4 IHL: Who is that?

5 Int: He is his cous-her cousin he live in London now and he got a job

(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

Cardiff and Vale College offer courses which integrate ESOL with vocational qualifications, called 'ESOL+', and regional educational co-ordinators noted that their students would like to pursue similar courses:

1 MC: Oes na unrhyw beth arall baswch chi'n dymuno?
2 WL: Hoffwn bod cyrsiau ymarferol ar gael iddynt hefyd,
3 I'r dysgwyr Saesneg i gyd nid dim ond y ffoaduriaid.
4 Mae Coleg Caerydd a'r Fro yn darparu cwrs Saesneg a thrin gwallt.
5 Base llawer o'm myfyrwyr yn dwli ar wneud y fath 'na o beth.

1 MC: Is there anything else that you would wish for?
2 WL: I would like to have vocational courses for them as well,
3 for all the ESOL students not just the refugees.
4 Cardiff and the Vale have hairdressing with ESOL.
5 A lot of my students are desperate to do this sort of thing.

(Excerpt from interview with education co-ordinator ('WL'), case study area 3)

The education co-ordinator for case study area 1 cited a lack of interest and learner numbers as a reason why vocational courses had not been formally commissioned by the local authority:

1 IHL: Do you have any kind of integrated ESOL-plus-construction provision?
2 FW: No um I don't and that's an interesting thing really
3 I don't know if our numbers would ever be sufficient to be able to run anything like that in conjunction with the college

(Excerpt from interview with community learning manager ('FW'), case study area 1)

Nevertheless, there was precedence in offering in-work ESOL, as a local abattoir had commissioned in-work English classes from a national education provider, Adult Learning Wales, for its workers:

1 FW: [The] only ESOL Adult Learning Wales deliver is up in the north in [town name] to the abattoir there […]
2 so they have two classes up there they used to have one in [area name]

3 again in a workplace
4 but I don't think that runs any more
(Excerpt from interview with FW case study area 1)

Despite the learning manager's assertion that no integrated vocational ESOL existed in conjunction with the college, an employee working for the local further education college indicated that, in fact, exceptions had been made for individual learners which allowed them to both study ESOL and work towards a vocational qualification:

1 IHL: When you say you've put ESOL in
2 are there kind of integrated ESOL-plus-subject courses
3 or are they separate ESOL=
4 FG: =In college or=
5 IHL: =Yeah in college yeah.
6 FG: What we do so they would apply for a course normally with the [xxx] vocational course
7 they could be on a catering course or they could be on construction
8 and then we would put an ESOL tutor on for maybe an hour for them as well
9 so they'd be getting some English as part of their course
(Excerpt from interview with further education co-ordinator ('FG'), case study area 1)

Similarly, in case study area 4, a vocational ESOL scheme was being organised for two young resettled refugees, in which they could learn English alongside studying for a vocational qualification:

1 IB: Cwrddasom ni a'r coleg
2 Rhywun sy'n delio a'r myfyrwyr 16 – 19 mlwydd oed […]
3 Dwedon ni amdanyn nhw [y pobl ifanc] a'r problemau a gofynasom ni os oedd 'na unrhyw siawns iddynt mynychu cwrs yn y professiynau oeddent ishe mynd iddynt
4 a daethon nhw nol atom a dweud nad oedd hynny'n broblem
5 am y chwe mis cyntaf byddan nhw ond yn gwneud yr ochr ymarferol,
6 dim y theori,
7 a wedyn yn derbyn tiwtoriaeth personol mewn Saesneg yn y prynhawnau.

1 IB: We met with the college,
2 someone who deals with the 16-19 year olds […]
3 We told them about the [young people] and the issues and asked if there was any possibility of a course in their chosen professions
4 and [they] came back and said that wasn't a problem.
5 For the first 6 months they will only be doing the practical side,

6 not the theory,
7 with one to one tuition on English in the afternoons.
(Excerpt from interview with resettlement scheme co-ordinator ('IB'), case study area 3)

The above excerpts show that, while on the whole there is little formal vocational ESOL across the case study areas, in some areas co-ordinators are combining existing resources to develop bespoke courses on a case-by-case basis. Thus, while the quantity and quality of provision varies regionally, there are notable examples of local actors utilising available resources to meet some of the demand (among resettled refugees) for appropriate linguistic and vocational training.

However, as education co-ordinator FG states, the integration of ESOL with vocational courses is provided only for those on the resettlement scheme. Migrants who had travelled to Wales by another route would not necessarily have provision adapted to their needs in a similar way:

1 IHL: Is that kind of flexibility […] the kind of standard procedure with migrants
2 or is it more to do with the fact that they're on this scheme?
3 FG: Yeah it's the scheme
(Excerpt from interview with further education co-ordinator, case study area 1)

The exceptions made for those on the VPRS have led some to accuse the scheme of creating a 'two-tier system', where those on the scheme have better access to care and services than migrants not on the scheme. This issue is further discussed in chapter 7.

a) Physical and mental health

Another notable barrier to employment and training is that of poor physical and mental health. The topic of health is a distinct field of its own, with considerable scholarship dedicated to the particular health risks, needs, and barriers to care faced by people in a forced migration context. Refugees are typically considered to experience relatively poor health both prior to and post-settlement, compared to people who migrate principally for economic reasons (Ager 2014: 439). While recent analysis indicates that those who migrated to the UK for family, study or employment have better health outcomes than those born in the UK (natives), it also found that those who

migrated to seek asylum have worse health outcomes than natives. While the health outcomes of natives and those who migrated for non-asylum reasons converge over time, there is no convergence over time for those who migrated to seek asylum (Giuntella, Kone & Vargas-Silva 2017).

My research with Syrians resettled in the convergence areas of Wales has gathered some evidence to suggest that health is a barrier to employment. The questionnaire data which were gathered indicated that 'Health' was listed as a barrier to ESOL for 5 participants (see chapter 5,), although no further information is available as to the severity or nature of these health concerns – a lacunae which necessitates further research[2].

The evidence on health as a barrier to employment which I have uncovered is therefore primarily qualitative. For example, issues with health were cited in three of the refugee focus groups:

> 1 IHL: What do you think the biggest barriers are in getting a job?
> 2 Interpreter: He said language [and] he's got a problem, health problem, issues
> (Excerpt from focus group, case study area 2)

> 1 Interpreter: He go to [xx] to ask about his arms and they don't know what the problem.
> 2 He can't write he can't- his arm hurt too much [….]
> 3 he stay at home about one month in the house
> (Excerpt from focus group, case study area 1)

'Health problems' were explicitly cited as barriers to employment in two of the above excerpts – first by the interpreter speaking on behalf of a focus group participant ("he's got a problem, health problems") and RO ("I told them I can't [work as a cleaner]/ because I have allergy I have problem"). Of note is that, while these two excerpts arose from the same focus group, they related to different participants within that group. In the third excerpt, health concerns did not explicitly limit the participant's access to employment, but rather limited his freedom of movement and ability either to write or leave the house, thus implicitly limiting his capacity for employment.

[2] A large-scale study undertaken on refugee and asylum seeker access to healthcare, undertaken by Swansea University and Displaced People in Action on behalf of Public Health Wales, is due to be published in April 2019. More information available at: https://www.dpia.org.uk/our-projects/hear/

Where refugees' health was judged to be too poor to search for work[3] provisions were made which allowed refugee claimants to access Employment Support Allowance (ESA), a benefit for those with work-limiting health conditions, rather than Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA).

1 LH: Mae gennym- mae rhai o'n unigolion yn sal iawn
2 a mae lwfans cyflogaeth a chymorth iddynt –
3 a mae'n hollbwysig bod hynny ar gael

1 LH: We have- some of our individuals are extremely ill
2 and we have an employment support allowance for some of our individuals,
3 rightly so.

(Excerpt from interview with statutory employment service branch manager ('LH'), case study area 4)

1 JS: The difference between [case study areas 2 and 5]
2 all the [area 2] people, when they've had a medical assessment,
3 have been found fit for work
4 and have been placed in Jobseekers' Allowance.
5 Whereas the people on [area 5] the Council have supported them far greater
6 and they've actually tended to remain on ESA
7 so they've got a lot more freedom and flexibility for the Jobseekers Allowance claimants at the moment
8 they're coming in to see us they're signing
9 but we're prioritising their English language skills

(Excerpt from interview with work coach ('JS') case study areas 2 and 5)

As stated by 'JS', work coach for case study areas 2 and 5, all adult claimants in case study area 2 had been found fit to work. This contrasts with the testimonies gathered in the area 2 focus group (above), in which two refugees stated that they had work-limiting health concerns. This indicates that, in some cases, there is a disparity between what refugees themselves feel are work-limiting health conditions, and those which are taken as such by statutory services. This is significant in the context of refugee resettlement, where those assessed as having work-limiting health conditions

[3] and in areas in which refugees were able to claim legacy benefits rather than Universal Credit (SSAC 2018)

are offered ESA as opposed to JSA. This allows claimants greater "freedom and flexibility" to pursue training such as English language classes.

Finally, the point was made by two interviewees that, in certain cases, VPRS participants are selected for resettlement by UNHCR on the basis of their poor health, a factor which contributes to their overall vulnerability:

1 CK: I mean bear in mind the selection criteria
2 some of it is people that have got well either mental conditions
3 or-you know-shrapnel wounds
4 all sorts of stuff which means it's not always appropriate for them to do-
5 particularly if they had perhaps manual work back in the Middle East
6 and then you've got-got a bullet lodged next to your neck vertebrae
7 you can't be doing heavy manual work so you know things like that

(Excerpt from interview with resettlement co-ordinator ('CK'), case study area 1)

1 MW: That was the reason the family was selected to come over
2 because one had a very serious, imminently terminal, if she hadn't been treated, case.
3 So that was a really nice story that they treated her- with dialysis I think it was -
4 and then they put her forward for a transplant
5 and within a week they'd got a donor
6 and um she's doing really well now
7 it's lovely to see that

(Excerpt from interview with work coach, location details omitted for anonymity)

As stated in chapter 3 section 2, refugees may be selected for resettlement under the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme on the basis of their having been survivors of torture or violence, or owing to their medical health needs (from an internal UNHCR document, reproduced in Bolt 2018: 46). Unsurprisingly then, VPRS participants may experience mental health issues which limit their capacity to undertake employment and training.

One interviewee expressed concern at the poor availability of suitable mental health provision for the VPRS participants:

1 YL: [It] did strike me towards the end of last year

2 that we had some learners who were struggling in terms of.. struggling to settle and struggling to progress
3 because they had […] unresolved […] mental health issues
4 that they really needed to address
5 that they could have done with accessing counselling
6 and that didn't seem to be set up or available

(Excerpt from interview with community education co-ordinator ('YL'), case study area 1)

The ESOL co-ordinator in a further education college emphasised that, while mental health issues were prevalent among the refugee students, none of them had accessed the college counsellor at the time of study. Rather, it often fell to the college tutors to provide pastoral care and spot "something big" (as stated below). Furthermore, the co-ordinator acknowledged that, even where counselling was available, the fact of its being in English made it hard for refugees to access, "because the language isn't there":

1 CO: Almost everyone has an element of mental health difficulties
2 they've all been through trauma
3 we had one who- three months after [they] arrived all [their] brothers were killed in Aleppo
4 so we're dealing with that sort of thing all the time
5 IHL: Can they get help in [area name]?
6 CO: You should speak to [the resettlement co-ordinator]
7 here they get help
8 we have a counsellor in the College
9 but we-none of them have received [counselling]
10 but the tutors are very good and if there's something big they'll spot it and signpost
11 so it's hard because the language isn't there, especially at the beginning

(Excerpt from interview with college ESOL co-ordinator ('CO'), case study area 2)

Thus, while 'health' is conceptualised as a means towards and marker of integration in Ager and Strang's framework (2008), this section shows that health, or lack of health, can itself act as a significant barrier inhibiting refugee access to education and employment-related activities. Moreover, while caseworkers have, in some areas, 'had a lot of time taken up with healthcare issues', there is insufficient provision of mental health services which are accessible to people for whom English is not a first language. This paucity of provision is, in some cases, inhibiting refugees' settlement and progress in education – a factor which may delay or prevent participants' access to employment.

6.3 Conclusion

This section has presented data on two key points. First, it has presented data relating to refugees' pre-settlement employment, education and training, as well as on current activity and aspiration. It has shown that, more men than women were employed prior to resettlement, there are nevertheless a number of women refugees who aspire to engage in employment and training post-resettlement. It has shown that three quarters of the refugee sample have not accessed education higher than secondary level, and just over half list primary-level education as their highest level of schooling. Few members of the refugee sample have ever gained a certificate from their study, and only a tiny minority have their qualifications with them in Wales. Despite this, the majority of the sample have aspirations for their future in Wales, which include improving their English, gaining work at a level commensurate to their skill and experience, gaining professional experience, and undertaking further training.

Secondly, this chapter has presented data on the barriers to employment and training for the refugee sample. Qualitative data has shown that refugees are generally dissatisfied with the availability of employment advice and support, and that their access to advice is inhibited by the assertion that refugees must improve their English before accessing guidance and training. The research has found that a lack of data collection regarding refugees' skills and experience, and that no diagnostic criteria of linguistic proficiency are used by employment advisors to inform advisory encounters. Women are doubly disadvantaged in this regard, as they are not typically included in statutory employment services as they are not the primary beneficiaries of state benefits. Lack of proficiency in Welsh has been found to be a barrier to employment for refugees aspiring to work in the education sector in majority-Welsh speaking areas. Furthermore, the paucity of appropriate employment and training opportunities, such as vocational ESOL classes has been found to be an additional barrier in all the case study areas – although communities and education providers are organising to meet this demand in some areas. Finally, refugees are more likely to experience work-limiting mental and physical health issues than other categories of migrants. In the absence of appropriate mental health support in Wales, this may significantly hamper the progress of the refugee sample in accessing employment and training.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

The previous chapters have presented data related to the barriers to education and employment of the refugee sample under study. This chapter will situate these data within contemporary discussions on language, migration, labour, gender and ethnicity. First, I will situate the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme within its broader context of migration and immigration in Wales and explore how discourses around the scheme produce two related binary distinctions; first, between the 'good' resettled refugee versus the 'bad' migrant/ asylum seeker and, second, between the 'enterprising' asylum seeker and the 'dependent' resettled refugee. Then, I will show that the difficulties experienced by some refugees in accessing work – and conversely, the success of others in gaining employment – problematises the assumed causal relationship between English language proficiency and access to employment. Looking at the experiences of those refugees who have found employment in Wales, I will question the quality and labour conditions of work which is typically undertaken by refugees and other migrant categories. Finally, I will analyse discourses of gender and culture, and argue that racialised tropes of Arab and Islamic culture mask structural barriers to education and employment which exacerbate the disenfranchisement of refugee women.

7.1 The 'two-tier system' and narratives of in/dependence in the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme

There are significant issues with several of the legal routes to residence and settlement for migrants, all of which warrant treatment and attention (Westminster Legal Forum 2018). Nevertheless, this section will focus on differences between the experiences of those who have been resettled in the UK under VPRS and those who are in the UK following a claim for asylum and discuss the narrative implications of these differences.

As outlined in chapter 2, sections 2.1 and 2.2, those who are resettled under VPRS receive significantly more support than those who have made a claim for asylum. Resettled refugees are provided with safe passage from refugee camp to the UK. They are provided with private rented accommodation and supported by caseworkers with many aspects of their integration in the UK, including opening a bank account, accessing

ESOL classes, and securing spaces in schools for their children. They do not experience a period of being without right to work in the UK, and they are less likely to experience, as a refused asylum seeker would, the threat of imminent deportation. As shown in chapter 6, in two cases bespoke training programmes have been created in areas which otherwise would not have training suitable for those with low levels of English proficiency. This bespoke provision has been made possible by the additional resources offered to local authorities hosting refugees under the scheme, as one employee at a further education college observed:

1	IHL:	Is that kind of flexibility around 'as long as they've got a bit of English it's okay [to join a vocational course]'
2		the kind of standard procedure with migrants
3		or is it more to do with the fact that they're on [VPRS]?
4	TR:	Yeah it's the scheme -um-
5		we've had others who are migrants
6		so [xxx] a good example there would be there's quite a big Polish community who came in and they're still around in [xxx] at the moment
7		we've had people arriving and young people arriving with no English who can't even participate in an interview for a course
8		and we've had to say well look you know we can't provide a translator for an interview
9		and if you need a translator for an interview you're obviously not ready to be in the college class
10		cos there's no additional resource around for it
11		so with them we've advised them to go to ESOL classes for a year or some cases longer in order to get enough English to then access
12		so as long as they're getting to about entry 2/ entry 3 standard

(interview with education co-ordinator ('TR'), case study area 1)

As TR states, 'other' migrants not on the scheme (including the Polish community) would not be afforded the same flexibility in terms of language requirements for a vocational course as would the resettled refugees. The flexibility is wholly due to the "additional resource" afforded by VPRS – there is no comparative resourcing available to those who have migrated through other routes. As one work coach put it, the additional provision under the Scheme means that they are able to "provide a gold-star service" to resettled refugees.

The provision of additional or bespoke services for those resettled on VPRS have led to some accusing the scheme creating a 'two-tier' system, privileging resettled refugees at the expense of refugees and asylum seekers who travelled to the UK via independent means (also known as 'spontaneous' arrivals) as in this excerpt from a caseworker from a refugee community organisation:

1 RD: It's kind of a two-tier system
2 and sometimes I think that the government have created a monster because of the package.
3 You've got your spontaneous refugees who are coming through and then when they get their status they've got to navigate,
4 we help them but we don't go to the jobcentre with them.

(Excerpt from interview with caseworker ('RD'), case study area 4)

Concerns about a two-tier system are not unprecedented. Concern about a two-tier system was similarly voiced in the report of an inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Refugees, which stated:

> *Throughout our inquiry we were told of a 'two-tier system' developing in the way the UK treats and protects refugees. […] We are concerned that the different levels of support will result in different prospects of successful integration depending on how a refugee has entered the UK. We are also concerned that, due to the different prospects, refugees will have a very different sense of how much they have been welcomed by the UK.*
>
> *(APPG on Refugees 2017: 47)*

There are certainly grounds to allege that the scheme creates a two-tier system. It is certainly true that resettled refugees are provided with substantially more support than those who settle in the UK through other means. Furthermore, the issue is not unique to a UK resettlement context – a new proposal was put forward in January 2019 by Ásmundur Einar Daðason, the Icelandic Minister for Social Affairs which seeks to ensure that asylum seekers are offered the same support as those who are resettled to the country, arguing that asylum seekers should have comparative support "in learning Icelandic, getting themselves settled, and adapting to society" (Daðason, quoted in Kyzer 2019).

However, despite the extra provision afforded to refugees under resettlement, chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis show that refugees resettled under VPRS still face considerable

structural barriers to education and employment. Furthermore, as available literature on refugee disadvantage shows (detailed in chapter 2), many of the structural barriers to education and employment experienced by resettled refugees are similar to those faced by spontaneous arrivals, including work-limiting health conditions, the 'language barrier', and non-recognition by UK employers of skills and experience obtained overseas (Bloch 2002; Crawley 2013; Giuntella et al. 2017).

Yet, despite considerable structural barriers to integration, several caseworkers interviewed for this thesis voiced the opinion that the resettled refugees were receiving 'too much' support, as in the below excerpts:

1 RD: Mae'n gor-help, llawer gormod,
2 Da' ni'n rhoi ffonau clyfar iddynt, ni'n rhoi tocynnau bws ar gyfer y flwyddyn, dan ni'n talu eu rhent
3 A mae'r cap ar fudd-daliadau yn dod i fewn
4 felly medra rhai teuluoedd ond hawlio 50c yr wythnos ar gyfer budd-dal tai
5 a mae rhai awrdurdod lleol yn cynfrannu tuag at rent
6 Dyna'r bwystfil, ynte,
7 a'r hogion 'ma'n siarad a'i gilydd ac yn cymharu'r hyn sydd ar gael ym mhob awrdurdod lleol
8 felly'n amal byddent yn dod atom ac yn deud mae'r pobl draw yn [xxx] wedi derbyn yr hyn neu'r llall, da ni am gael yr un peth

1 RD: It's over-help, it's too much.
2 We give them smart phones, we give them bus passes for a year, we pay their rent
3 and the benefit cap is coming in
4 so some families are only entitled to 50p per week housing benefit
5 and some local authorities are topping up their rent.
6 It's the monster thing,
7 all of these guys are talking to each other and then comparing of what's happening in each local authority
8 so often people will come to us and say the people in [xxx] have such and such, we want the same.
(Excerpt from interview with caseworker ('RD'), case study area 4)

Similarly, in area 1 a caseworker stated:

1 FT: Because a lot of refugees who are not on the vulnerable persons' resettlement scheme
2 feel that the families think that
3 everyone around they could click to [*clicking fingers*]
4 do this do this for me

5 and they don't wanna take responsibility of their own…responsibility basically […]

The caseworker elaborates further by discussing the opinions of an acquaintance of his, a refugee not on VPRS, stating that this refugee wishes:

6 […] that the family starts taking control over their own life rather than thinking that it's gonna last
7 [*clicking fingers*] y'know clicking fingers and things gonna happen
8 cos one day they will really have to do it for themselves
9 and like no matter how hard we try we just have to do our best and hope for the best
10 but for me I look at the strength that these families have got and I have hope for them
11 I have hope for them that they will survive
12 I – even if there's a community mechanism not there they will survive
13 cos they survived a war

(Excerpt from interview with resettlement caseworker ('FT'), case study area 1)

In both the interview with RD and that with FT, the implication is that the resettled Syrians become dependent on the scheme, and thus do not have "control over their own lives". This perception was surprisingly widespread among those employed to support VPRS participants. One caseworker employed in a non-governmental organisation argued that the support offered to VPRS participants created a "culture of dependency" which impeded both their integration and their linguistic development. According to them, refugees who had gained status via asylum developed their fluency in English at a much faster rate – although the caseworker gave no indication of how they had developed such a comparative estimation of refugees' linguistic proficiency. In the caseworkers' own words, resettled refugees are "mollycoddled […] and it debilitates them".

What we see in these examples is a binary distinction between the 'deserving' asylum seeker who has struggled to gain refugee status and the 'undeserving' resettled refugee, who has been mollycoddled. This distinction runs contrary to dominant narratives, noted by social policy theorists such as Rosemary Sales, in which refugees are typically portrayed as 'legitimate' and 'deserving' of support, while asylum seekers are 'undeserving', 'illegitimate' (Sales 2002). In this vein, refugee resettlement can invoke a similar "binary discourse [which] implies that the refugees who wait' for

resettlement are 'good' and those who seek their own path to safety and travel, arriving in a developed country to seek asylum, are somehow 'bad'" (Van Selm 2014: 518).

Like the 'good refugee'/'bad asylum-seeker', the caseworkers' narrative similarly separates migrants into two camps – the good and the bad, the deserving and the undeserving migrant (Dhaliwal and Forket 2015). But the binary is flipped on its head – this time it is the asylum seeking-refugee who is the good, the deserving, for is it they who have 'taken responsibility' for their own lives and haven't been 'mollycoddled' into debilitation. Meanwhile, the resettled refugees in receipt of state welfare are judged less favourably – they are treated like "children" by the state (as in the excerpt below), and so do not learn to be independent as an asylum seeker is said to:

> 1 RD: Sometimes treating the adults like children doesn't help
> 2 because you're not really helping them to become independent
> (Excerpt from interview with caseworker, case study area 1)

This narrative is akin to the myth of 'skivers vs strivers', in which society is divided along two lines. On the one hand are the 'strivers'; those who work hard, aspire to achieve greater social status and accumulate material wealth. On the other are the 'skivers' (also known as 'scroungers'); those who are (typically) unemployed, reliant the state and who do not contribute to society (Blackmore 2015). By this logic, social welfare systems so mollycoddle the poor and unemployed that they are remain trapped in a culture of dependency on the state, without motive or imperative to seek and gain employment (Monbiot 2017). This myth recasts poverty as a "moral or even biological condition", a cause for shame rather than empathy (ibid; Blackmore 2015). Yet it does nothing to explore the structural causes of poverty and inequality. It offers no analysis of the impact of gender, ethnicity, welfare, or socioeconomic background. Rather, the myth of 'skivers vs strivers' shifts the burden of responsibility for poverty on to the shoulders of those who suffer it most. Not only are you poor, says the narrative, but it is you – and your dependence – that is the cause of your continued impoverishment. This myth is the modern articulation of a historic class prejudice – the belief that, as wrote George Orwell in 'Road to Wigan Pier',

> *'the working- class have been absurdly pampered, hopelessly demoralised by dole, old-age pensions, free education etc.'*
>
> *(Orwell 1937, cited in Valentine and Harris 2014: 87).*

Thus, what we see in the interview excerpts listed above is the development of a narrative which weaves together these two binary discourses: deserving/ undeserving migrant with skivers/ strivers. At its core, this narrative carries with it a value judgement which implies that the extent to which refugees are 'deserving' is related to their level of economic independence of the State, and their moral worth determined by the extent to which they 'work hard' towards this aim. The idealisation of the deserving, hard-working refugee is not unique to the caseworkers' narratives. In a recent opinion piece entitled 'Welcoming Refugees Makes Total Economic Sense', the ex-leader of the Labour party, David Miliband and former secretary of state for the United States, Madeleine Albright stated:

> *when given the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a welcoming country, refugees make enormous contributions. Despite being among the most vulnerable and destitute when they arrive, the data shows that refugees work hard and quickly become net economic contributors in their host societies. In other words, resettling refugees is not just the right thing to do - it's the smart thing, too.*
>
> *(Albright and Miliband 2019)*

Pointing out that refugees can be hard workers is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. However, a narrative of inclusion that is predicated mainly on the potential economic worth and 'hard-work ethic' of refugees risks demonising those who remain in long-term unemployment post-resettlement – whether through ill-health, poor luck, or the countless structural barriers cited in this research. Fundamentally, a human's worth is not reducible to their capital. As Valentine and Harris state, the idealisation of the ethic of economic self-interest risks "producing a process of de-socialisation in which the importance of values such as care, compassion and social responsibility [become] casualties" (Valentine and Harris 2014: 84). Research and discourse which seeks to improve access to education and employment for a disenfranchised population should be wary of reproducing harmful discourses which imply that a person is worthy of support only if they are active participants in the labour market, and which tacitly denigrate recipients of social welfare programmes. That these discourses are being perpetuated even by those claiming to support refugee rights should be a matter of concern.

7.2 Deconstructing the 'language barrier'

As noted in chapter 6, there is a dominant assumption which states that proficiency in the main host country language (in this case, English) is the primary barrier to employment for refugee and migrant communities (Casey 2016). This section will deconstruct the concept of a 'language barrier' and show that the relationship between linguistic proficiency and employment outcomes is considerably more complicated than the 'language barrier' narrative would suggest.

As applied sociolinguist, Ingrid Piller writes in her book *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*:

> *One of the most widespread assumptions around linguistic diversity and work is that it is a lack of proficiency in the language of the destination country that constitutes the main barrier migrants face accessing work. Hence, policy makers as well as migrants themselves assume learning the language will bring employment. (2016: 64)*

However, as Piller argues, the assumption that linguistic proficiency is the main barrier to migrant employment can be easily disproved. She draws our attention to the example of the employment outcomes of Iraqi translators who worked for the Australian army in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and were subsequently resettled in Australia following troop withdrawal. If proficiency in the main host country language were truly the primary determinant of successful employment outcomes for migrants, one would expect the Afghan interpreters, with their high levels of proficiency in English, to be significantly more successful in obtaining employment than migrants with lower levels of fluency. However –

> [as] it turns out, the employment outcomes of this group of model migrants were no different from those who are so often exhorted by politicians and the media to learn English [… After] three years in Australia only nine out of 223 former Iraqi army translators and interpreters were in full time employment. And only one single person of these was employed in their area of expertise.
>
> (ibid: 65)

The Afghan interpreters' experiences on the Australian job-market are fairly consistent with the experiences of refugees on other managed resettlement

programmes. In 2007, the Sussex University Centre for Migration Research commissioned a report looking into the experiences of refugees resettled in Brighton and Hove under the Gateway Protection scheme. The report does not offer evidence of participants' proficiency in English but does state that at the time of the research, only one third of refugee participants required a translator – suggesting that two-thirds held at least a conversational level of proficiency in English. After one year of searching for employment, only 2 out of 40 refugees had succeeded in finding work. (Collyer and de Guerre 2007: 42-43).

To return to our own sample, as indicated in chapter 5, at least two participants declared their English language proficiency to be 4 out of 5 (5 = fluent, 0 = not at all) across all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, while two listed their reading ability as 'fluent'. If English language proficiency were sufficient as a determinant of job-searching success, one would expect the refugee participants who had gained employment to be among the sample's upper percentile in terms of language proficiency. However, the questionnaire participant who indicated that they had obtained employment was not one of those who self-reported, fluent, or near-fluent levels of English proficiency. Furthermore, an employability advisor ('EA') in the case study area where a refugee had gained employment revealed a different picture:

1 EA: We've had one gentleman from one of our families go into employment working at a chicken processing plant [XXX] and they have a very wide range of ethnicities
2 a lot of which their English is minimal because it's not required
3 so it's an easy job for them to get I suppose […]
4 Some [refugees] arrived actually with very good English they were the more educated people
4 we've had an engineer and a teacher so their language is actually excellent
5 we've had others come in not a word not a single word
6 IHL: So the gentleman […who] has got the job in the chicken factory um was he one of the people who were more educated if you like?
7 EA: No I'd say he was mid-range
(Excerpt from interview with employment advisor, case study areas 2 and 5. Details have been omitted to maintain confidentiality)

The assumptions that one can draw from this data are limited in that the sample of participants who have obtained employment are very small. However the data indicates that the assumption of a positive relationship between refugees' linguistic proficiency and success in finding a job is overstated (at best). That the teacher and

engineer had not succeeded in finding jobs, despite their 'excellent' language, indicates that there are other factors at play which determine refugees' employment outcomes. As one refugee participant put it:

1 I don't know what the reason (I haven't got a job)
2 maybe my language not very perfect,
3 really I don't know the reason.
4 For now, for lots of people they have problem for language but after they solve this problem they will face another problem.
5 Now the main problem language but for me now there's another problem.

(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

To challenge the assumption of a causal relationship between migrants' linguistic proficiency and employment outcomes is not to say that fluency has no bearing on employment outcomes. Indeed, migrants with low levels of proficiency in host country language/s are more likely to be subjected to various forms of exploitative labour conditions in that country (Vigouroux 2018: 323). I will return to this observation in the following section. However, to interrogate the language-employment correlation is to acknowledge that there are other factors, besides linguistic proficiency, which can act either as inhibitors or enablers to refugee employment. Following interviews with 454 refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, the Refugee Employment and Skills Study commissioned by the Welsh Government found language proficiency to have a "significant but not sufficient" impact on rates of refugee employment (Holtom and Iqbal 2020). That is to say that, while linguistic proficiency undoubtedly affects refugees' success in obtaining employment, it is only part of the picture. As shown by the experience of the refugee referred to by the advisor (EA) for areas 2&5, other factors, besides English language proficiency, can either inhibit or enable refugees' access to the labour market. These factors are further described by the employment advisor whose interview is reproduced in section b). When asked about the characteristics of the person who had succeeded in obtaining employment, they replied:

1 EA: I think he had more confidence

2 it's taken others longer to get used to a UK way of life and that is a barrier that I know people I've spoken to who work at the council have encountered
3 and we have a little bit
4 but he adapted a lot more quickly got to grips with public transport and the idea of everything
5 and just I think it was through a friend he got the vacancy rather than anything we directly did
6 'cos it was quite a pleasant surprise when he came in and asked us about financial help with work and what were the benefits he'd be entitled to
7 IHL: Good social networking
8 EA: Yes and that is a big thing it's the support of the-the community around the mosque and other people in the area

(Excerpt from interview with employment advisor, case study areas 2&5)

According to EA, having confidence, knowing 'UK way of life', being able to use public transport, and having friends and social networks all contributed to the persons' success in gaining employment. Here, I return to Ager and Strang's framework for integration, in which both language and cultural knowledge are facilitators towards social bridges, bonds and links, which can enable access to the marker/ mean of employment. While the man who gained employment may not have been able to speak English fluently, he nevertheless had considerable cultural knowledge – both of the 'UK way of life' and of the community around the mosque – as well as social networks, which enabled his access to employment.

Employment advisors in case study area 1 observed a similar phenomenon, as indicated in this excerpt from an interview with three advisors who were employed by a statutory employment service:

1 JR: sometimes I think we think that because there's [ESOL] provision there they [refugees] should attend, but really they just want to work
2 DM: It's a naïve assumption.
3 Some have set up a business in the past – they come here and there's a support network and they find work.
4 But without that support network English is much more necessary.
5 Comes down to individual needs.

6 TO: we sourced a placement for one person in a Turkish barber's shop, you don't need English working with those
(Excerpt from interview with employment advisors, case study area 1)

According to the employment advisors in the excerpt above, those who are able to access 'support networks' in Wales are more likely to want to find work than to attend English classes. Furthermore, there are certain types of employment, such as work in a Turkish barber shop, or indeed work in a chicken factory, which do not require a high level of English fluency. Indeed, employment may be obtained through social, ethnic, or cultural networks rather than evidence of linguistic proficiency. The experiences of both the refugee who obtained work in a chicken factory and who worked in a barber shop indicate that, contrary to the dominant 'English-first' model espoused by several study participants, cultural knowledge and social connection are no less important than linguistic proficiency as factors which enable refugees to gain employment (Ager and Strang 2008: 170). Furthermore, and commensurate with research undertaken by applied linguists Block and Goldstein (among others) the experiences of these employed refugees challenge the dominant assumption that a migrant to the UK must have a complete grasp of the English language in order to function as an employee (Block 2007; Goldstein 1997; Casey 2016).

However, as indicated in chapter 2, the Welsh Government has recently made several commitments removing barriers to "secure and stable employment" for all people in Wales, and that the employment outcomes of refugees in particular are improved (Welsh Government 2017; 2019). Furthermore, in 2018 the Fair Work Commission was established by the First Minister for Wales (then Carwyn Jones), to investigate what the Welsh Government could be doing to promote fair working practices in Wales. Its recommendations will be issued in Spring 2019 (Welsh Government 2018). In this context, it is insufficient to merely demonstrate that the causal relationship between linguistic proficiency and employment outcomes is overstated. It is also necessary to investigate the kinds of employment that are being accessed by refugees in Wales and to ask, to what extent are refugees able to access secure employment and fair working conditions in Wales?

7.3 Fair Work?

In order to answer this question, is it first necessary to state what secure employment is, and to do so I refer to the seven types of labour-related security that were pursued by unionists and workers as part of the 'industrial citizenship' agenda for the working class and proletariat after the Second World War:

> **Forms of labour security under industrial citizenship**
>
> *Labour market security* – Adequate income-earning opportunities; at the macro-level, this is epitomised by a government commitment to 'full employment'.
>
> *Employment security* – Protection against arbitrary dismissal, regulations on hiring and firing, imposition of costs on employers for failing to adhere to rules and so on.
>
> *Job security* – Ability and opportunity to retain a niche in employment, plus barriers to skill dilution, and opportunities for 'upward' mobility in terms of status and income.
>
> *Work security* – Protection against accidents and illness at work, through, for example, safety and health regulations, limits on working time, unsociable hours, night work for women, as well as compensation for mishaps.
>
> *Skill reproduction security* – Opportunity to gain skills, through apprenticeships, employment training and so on, as well as opportunity to make use of competencies.
>
> *Income security* – Assurance of an adequate stable income, protected through, for example, minimum wage machinery, wage indexation, comprehensive social security, progressive taxation to reduce inequality and to supplement low incomes.
>
> *Representation security* – Possessing a collective voice in the labour market, through, for example, independent trade unions, with a right to strike.
>
> (reproduced in Standing 2011: 10)

While not all workplaces guarantee all forms of labour security all the time, it is reasonable to suggest that 'secure' employment would typically include most of these forms of security, most of the time. In our sample we uncovered five instances of people having worked at some point during their resettlement in Wales. One, described by the work coach for areas 2 and 5 (above) had gained work in a chicken factory. A focus group participant described having worked in a takeaway for seven months. One questionnaire respondent (detailed in section 7.3) had gained employment "at a level much lower than [his] skills and experience". One questionnaire respondent, Mahmoud, had the following to say about their experience of employment:

> The last job I have been to is in Cardiff with an Iranian guy who accepted to employ me with my low English level, but because my English level he offers me £40 daily with 8 hours of working, and my car needs £20 every day for petrol from [home] to Cardiff, so I didn't accept to work there.
>
> (Excerpt from written statement by Mahmoud).

Mahmoud's experience of being offered less than the minimum wage was not exceptional among the sample. Another participant, Naser, stated that he used to "work about 4 or 5 months in a restaurant but this is difficult work and too hard for me because [the employer] give me a less for minimum wage". As with Mahmoud, Naser's account of his experience linked his poor employment conditions to the fact that, in the absence of employment advice, he was reliant on work which did not require a high level of proficiency in English:

> 1 I've found if I need job only, without any help, I must go to for example restaurant Arabic because this is easy for me
> 2 but not good for me because they don't give me a minimum wage money
>
> (Excerpt from interview with Naser)

Furthermore, one support worker reported that a refugee client had been shouted at by a work coach in English – a language which he didn't understand. When the client became visibly upset, a telephone interpretation service was used to tell the client that if he could not speak English he needed to go to the 'Arab area' in Cardiff to get a job. Thus, some refugees in the sample are being directed towards employment which is 'easy' for them to get – work which does not require a high degree of proficiency in the English language. However, as Naser's experience shows, some of the employers who are willing to take migrants with low levels of proficiency in English are engaging them in exploitative conditions, which includes offering applicants less than minimum wage.

This perception of linguistic proficiency not being a requirement for manual work resonates with the latest International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), which conceptualises levels of employment into four 'rungs', or levels of skill. These are differentiated according to:

> *1) required level of education (primary school for level 1 to 3-6 year of higher education for level 4);*

2) use of strength and endurance vs abstract thinking (level 4); and

3) use of literacy and numeracy (from peripheral use for level 1 to extended and complex use for level 4). (Vigroroux 2017: 316)

According to the ISCO-08, linguistic communication skills are only relevant for levels 3 and 4, although it is not clear how communication skills are assessed and differentiated according to level of employment (ibid). Nevertheless, in the ISCO-08, there is a clear distinction between 'literate' and 'non-literate' workplaces, with 'manual' work falling into the latter camp. What we see in the interviews with WR and the area 1 work coaches is the reiteration of this idea that communicative skills are not required for the 'manual' work at which refugees are best suited, such as driving, factory work, and hairdressing.

First, I would like to trouble the assumption that certain workplaces are 'literacy-free'. As Vigoroux writes, a study by Hull, undertaken in an electronic factory in California demonstrates that, in fact, workers in so-called 'non-literate workplaces' employ a large range of communicative devices in order to competently perform their work, from verbal communication to interpretation and production of written signs and instructions. As Vigoroux writes,

literacy requirements of work and the evaluation of workers' literate abilites fail to capture the complex literate activities performed at the workplace (Hull 1991, quoted in Vigoroux 2017: 317)

Furthermore, despite the assumption of manual work as being 'literacy-free', the fact that several refugees in our research were denied employment in 'manual work' – for example in the Amazon warehouse – on the basis of their proficiency in English demonstrates that, even in manual labour, there is the expectation that applicants will be able to demonstrate an (unspecified) level of linguistic proficiency:

1 HPD: A couple of the dads have been for interviews with Amazon and haven't been successful
2 because of their language skills
(Interview with resettlement co-ordinator, case study area 1)

Yet, as noted in section 5, the level of proficiency which refugees must obtain to ensure that their applications for work will not be turned down on the basis of language remains unspecified. In no interview could I establish the level of English proficiency which would guarantee a refugee would not be excluded from employment on the basis of their linguistic proficiency, even in roles which, owing to their 'literacy-free' status, would be classified as being of comparatively low-skill on the ISCO-08 (ILO 2008).

Secondly, I question whether the refugees in our study have been judged by work coaches and prospective employers alike to be more incompetent – in level of skill as well as proficiency in English – than they in fact are. Insufficient data have been gathered by this research to prove whether refuges' levels of skill are in fact underestimated by work coaches and prospective employers. However, research has been undertaken which shows that those who speak English with a 'foreign' accent tend to be rated more negatively on traits such as intelligence and friendliness than speakers of hegemonic variants of ('standard') English – for example, those with received pronunciation (Giles and Watson 2013). Qualitative evidence on gathered refugees' experiences of job searching would seem to support this theory. Aziz, a focus group participant said (in English):

1 IHL: What do you feel are the biggest barriers to you getting employment? […]
2 AD: No for me no problem for language
3 but I don't know why I'm applying but I don't know what the reason
4 I give you one example uh I applied to [xxx] company
5 is very famous here
6 and they want a number of engineers to start from beginning for training one year's training
7 and after that they will go to directly to job
8 and I applied and they said me okay I applied my CV
9 they said there's scenario challenge they have to go through it
10 and they sent it to me and I answered
11 and they said okay you have succeeded but now you have video interview
12 I have to open the website and prepare myself and this question I have to answer it
13 I did the video
14 they said sorry the course is high standard
15 but I'm electrical engineer!
16 And there's one year training so really I don't know what the reason
17 maybe when they saw me by video, my age?
18 I don't know what the reason
19 maybe my language not very perfect,
20 really I don't know the reason.

21 For now for lots of people they have problem for language but after they solve this problem they will face another problem.
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

Aziz's account describes his confusion at being rejected for a role for which he, as a trained electrical engineer, was overqualified. Despite having passed the online competency-based test, Aziz was rejected when his prospective employers saw and heard him. This left him guessing as to the reason for his rejection – was he rejected on the basis of his appearance? Because he was perhaps older than the other applicants? Or was it because his language was not 'very perfect'? As the above excerpt shows, Aziz competently communicates his narrative in English, including the use of more complex constructions, including displaying a range of tenses. He also speaks slowly, with an accent that marks him as a learner of English. It is, of course, impossible to say definitively on what basis Aziz was denied employment. However, from the employers' alleged response that the course is of a "high standard", one can certainly make a fair assumption that Aziz was judged to be below the standard required of the course – despite his professional experience and training in the field.

Maher's (MF) experience, referred to in chapter 6 of this thesis, resonates with the theme that refugees' skills and experience are undervalued or overlooked. Maher had spent his entire professional life as a teacher and had been searching for opportunities in the education sector Wales. While he had a high level of English proficiency, he had been advised that his lack of Welsh language proficiency was a barrier to his gaining employment. But rather than support Maher to gain work experience and training in a role related to his area of expertise, he reported having been advised to seek work as a cleaner. Maher's experience demonstrates that the undervaluing of refugees' skills is not only an issue at the point of application for employment – it can occur earlier in the jobsearching journey, at the point where refugees receive employment advice and guidance.

Similarly, this research found that the tendency of employment advisors to overlook refugees' prior experiences and skills impacted the kind of training and career development opportunities offered to them. In one instance, an employment advisor from a non-statutory service had been working with some refugee women who had been teachers in Syria – although the advisor was hesitant to call them teachers:

1 VO: We've looked at [the women's] previous experience,

2 like they were teachers,
3 or they say teachers but they were teachers of the Quran.
(Excerpt from interview with employment advisor ('VO') case study area 4)

The implication is clear: the women were 'like' teachers only. They may have said they were teachers, however the contrastive conjunction "but" posits that their supposed status as teachers is called into question by the fact of their having taught the Quran. The Quran thus becomes a signifier for invalidity, indexing that the women's professional experience was outside that which would be typically accepted as professionalism in 'our' culture. The listener is implicated in this positioning – we are expected to understand the Quran's significance and to agree that, yes, the fact of the women having taught the Quran invalidates their claim to the status of 'teacher' in the UK. In this way, the refugee women and their professional experience are 'Othered' and are positioned outside of 'our' community of value (Anderson 2015).

The teachers were offered training by the employment advisor, but it was not training in the field of education – religious or otherwise. It was training in food hygiene, which would qualify the women to work in the catering and hospitality industries. Perhaps unsurprisingly given their professional backgrounds, the women were uninterested in this work:

1 VO: when we work with some of the women like with the food hygiene
2 we find that they have absolutely no interest in going out to work
3 and even leaving the house.
(ibid)

The employment advisor does not appear to entertain the possibility that this lack of interest is caused by the women having been engaged in training that is not relevant to their fields of interest and experience. Rather, it is taken as evidence that the women:

1 […] are not seen as economically of any worth
2 by the men and by themselves,
3 because they are meant to be like queens in the house
(ibid)

Perceptions of gender and gender roles in the discourses of those involved with refugee resettlement are further explored in section 7.5 of this chapter.

In the cases of Aziz, Maher, and the teachers, we have three instances of refugees being judged as incompetent practitioners of their chosen career path. Aziz's judgement occurred at the point of his having applied for work in his chosen field, whereby the judgement was communicated to Maher early on, as he received employment 'advice'. It is not clear whether the judgement of incompetence was communicated to the teachers in a similar way. What is clear is that they were judged to have experience which was 'outside' the realm of accepted professionalism in 'our' community – a perception which may have impacted the advisor's decision to offer an alternative means of employment.

The alternative career paths which Maher and the teachers were offered were all in jobs which would have been low on the ISCO-08's conceptualisation of labour skills. They are also jobs in sectors – catering and hospitality – in which precarious labour conditions such as zero-hours or temporary employment contracts are rife and in which employees are vulnerable to abuse – the 2004 Gangmasters (licensing) Act doesn't cover the care and hospitality sectors, for example (Standing 2011:99). They are also the sectors in which migrant workers are "concentrated in the greatest numbers" (ibid). There is a growing body of scholarship which shows that not only are migrants significantly overrepresented at the lower end of the labour market, but that migrants in these roles are at particular risk of exploitation and labour insecurity, characterised by low pay, long working hours, and few employment rights including access to sick pay, parental leave leave, or protection against unfair dismissal (Lewis 2014; TUC 2008; Jayaweera and Anderson 2008). While being a migrant does not necessarily entail being a person of colour, our refugee sample are both ethnically non-white and migrant. Of relevance, then, are recent findings by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) that:

> *[as] compared to permanent employees, workers in casual employment are more likely: to be young, non-white and employed in an elementary occupation; experience lower job satisfaction and life satisfaction; have perceived low employment security; and higher levels of anxiety and depression and are more likely to anticipate losing their jobs and withdraw from the labour market. (TUC 2018: 7)*

Further to the evidence that migrant workers are a particularly vulnerable group, and that both migrants and people of colour are especially likely to be employed in insecure

labour conditions, in my research I found that refugees were overwhelmingly directed towards casual, low-wage, insecure work on the basis of their 'low proficiency' in English.

One interview with work coaches in area 1 demonstrated how the funnelling of migrants towards low-security work happens in practice:

1 PL: I don't wonder if we can't do something for the Syrians like we did for the Polish communities.
2 There was someone who stood out as a community leader,
3 who could drive,
4 who acted as an interpreter in the factories on site,
5 who helped organise the groups of workers
6 IHL: Was that in [an abattoir]?
7 TM: yes
8 JK: it was easier because the Poles could come over with their driving licences and use them here
9 PL: they had a bit of English too,
10 it's different with the Syrians, they're starting really with nothing.
11 But if you've got a big employer that can take a group, like in Amazon, they pay good money
12 it's hard work but then they are hard workers
(Excerpt from interview with work coaches, case study area 1)

This last sentence, "hard work but then they are hard workers", was repeated almost word-for-word in an interview with a resettlement co-ordinator in case study area 4, again in reference to work at the Amazon warehouse:

1 EF: [If the refugees applicants had been successful in gaining employment] Amazon would have put on a bus to get there and back,
2 the wage was really good.
3 Hard work but they are hard workers.
(Excerpt from interview with resettlement co-ordinators, case study area 4)

The speakers do not appear to question the labour conditions which make work at Amazon 'hard' – despite the fact that trade union GMB have denounced unsafe working practices and insecure employment contracts at the company (Feiner 2018). Rather, refugees' readiness to undertake such 'hard work' is framed as a positive attribute. To refer to the binaries detailed in section a) of this chapter, the positive attribution of readiness to work discursively positions as 'strivers', deserving of the 'good' wage which work at Amazon would bring. The view that migrants are harder workers is not unique to the research sample. Mackenzie and Forde and Lewis et al note that migrants

are frequently perceived to be harder workers than natives. This may be due to their willingness to accept harsh labour conditions due to the limited range of employment options available to them and to "the large volume of available labour at the low end of the labour market" (MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Lewis et al 2014: 4).

It is clear that refugees in Wales face significant barriers to fair, secure work in Wales and the United Kingdom. This section has shown that not only are refugees disadvantaged by the aforementioned barriers of a lack of qualifications, access to training, work-limiting health conditions, and so on – they also encounter the significant structural barrier of being perceived to be less skilled than they are. The experiences of our refugee sample show that this perception of incompetence has led some work coaches to recommend that refugees pursue employment in roles not only well below their level of skill and experience, but also in which they will be vulnerable to potentially exploitative labour conditions. It may be that employment advisors are pursuing this line of advice out of a desire to see the client employed as soon as possible, in the belief that, once employed, they will have the economic means to 'climb up' and access better employment. Yet a literature review undertaken by researchers Holtom and Iqbal has found no evidence that refugees who enter low-wage, low-security employment improve their wages and employment security over time (Holtom and Iqbal 2019). In the following section, I will consider the extent to which discrimination poses an additional barrier to employment for refugees in Wales.

7.4 Language and discrimination

From the above evidence, it is clear that many refugees in our sample are considered to be incompetent speakers of English, both by work coaches and potential employers. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the perception of refugees as incompetent interlocutors calls into question their competence as potential employees. As sociolinguist Ingrid Piller writes, our professional identities are inextricably linked to our linguistic proficiency:

> *you cannot 'be' an educational expert […] if you do not sound like one. 'Being' an educational expert […] involves performing these identities: you have 'to do being' (Piller 2017: 73)*

Thus, migrants who find themselves in societies where they do not speak the dominant host-country language can find that their identity is redefined in direct relation to their proficiency in that language. Aziz, for example, finds that instead of being viewed as a professional electrical engineer, he is judged to be not even at a "standard" high enough to undertake a training course in engineering. Naser finds that, as his English is not deemed good enough to qualify him for funded training, he must accept exploitative labour conditions in an Arabic restaurant. Instead of maintaining his identity as a teacher, Maher is recast as a cleaner. In all of these experiences, the reformulation of migrants' identities involves significant de-classing.

Thus, a migrant's immersion in a new linguistic landscape leads to the development of new subject positions which, as noted by Block, "cannot but impact on the individual's sense of self" (Block 2009: 132). Mahmoud's testimony, for example, suggests he has internalised the idea that he must expect poor employment conditions on the basis of his supposedly low linguistic proficiency: his prospective employer "accepted" to employ him despite his low English level, and "because" of his English he was offered £40 daily. The consistent emphasis placed on linguistic proficiency as a route to employment posits language learning as a method by which migrants can improve their economic and social positions. Yet the experiences of refugees such as Aziz and Maher demonstrate that this is an empty promise – even when refugees have achieved some proficiency in the dominant host-county language, they will not necessarily be granted access to employment at a level commensurate to their skills and experience. Furthermore, employment advice which foregrounds language learning as *the* method of self-improvement shifts the burden of responsibility for upward mobility squarely on the shoulders of the migrants themselves. This is a pervasive myth: that the migrant could become like the native – and thus access the native's spheres of power and privilege – if only they would successfully master the dominant language of that country. As wrote Frantz Fanon in his classic text, 'Peau Noire/ Masques Blanc' (Black Skin/ White Masks), writing in the context of France:

> *The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. (Fanon 1952: 8)*

This myth masks the role that structural inequalities such as racial discrimination and prejudice can play in excluding migrants and people of colour from professional *milieu.* As Park writes:

> *Workers under neoliberalism are constantly advised to pay attention to matters of language […] In such advice, the role of language in reproducing inequalities in the job market is erased, and the false promise that language learning brings is denied; instead, workers who heed such advice internalize the logic of neoliberalism and are led to see any difficulty they experience in the harsh job market as their own fault (Park 2010).*

Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the job market it is replete with the 'inequalities' to which Park alludes. One advisor interviewed for my research, who worked for a project which supported BAME and migrant people into employment and training, detailed that the job entailed "more work than any other project we've ever had because of the […] prejudice in the area, because of the racism in the area", with one employer having responded to her request for a placement with the answer "we don't have people like that in here".

This experience is consistent with what Heath and Cheung (2006) term the 'ethnic penalty' faced by BAME people in the workplace – the notion that BAME people are disadvantaged against in employment recruitment on the basis of their ethnicity. As noted by Reni Eddo-Lodge in her searing 2017 treatise on race in Britain, 'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race', ethnic minority people in England and Wales have consistently had lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than white people. Furthermore, according to census data, between 1991 and 2011 black men have consistently experienced double the rates of unemployment, compared to their white men (Eddo-Lodge 2017: 69). A (now oft-cited) large-scale employment study shows that Canadian employers routinely discriminate against those with 'Asian-sounding' names, including Indian, Pakistani and Chinese (Oreopoulous 2011). Another study found applications from a fake profile with the name 'Adam Henton' received three times more calls to interview than an identical CV headed with the name 'Mohamed Allam' (Adesina and Marocico 2017). A field experiment undertaken for the Department of Work and Pensions found that ethnic minority candidates were discriminated against in favour of white applicants to employment in 29% of cases

(Wood et al. 2009). A study undertaken by thinktank Demos in 2015 found that British Muslims are proportionally more underrepresented across managerial positions than any other religious group (Reynolds and Birdwell 2015).

Of particular relevance to the refugee sample is the function of language in the labour-market exclusion of refugees. Linguist Celia Roberts found that the competency-based interview is a process in which judgements of competency or likability are predicated on the assessment of an applicant's communication. However, that which is being assessed in interview communication is not only a person's linguistic 'proficiency' (vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and so on), but also how capable they are of presenting sociocultural workplace knowledge and demonstrating that they are aware of accepted norms of self-presentation (Gumperz 1993; Roberts 2013). Depending on the context, the candidate may need to evidence awareness of sayings, colloquialisms, or other linguistic signifiers which show that they already 'in' the workplace culture. Thus, judgements by gatekeepers (employers or work advisors)

> *of an applicant's competency or personality ('I didn't really trust him') are based on assessment of adequacy of how he or she talks, but there is no institutionalised space for this to be acknowledged. (Roberts 2013: 91)*

In a British context, non-native speakers of English are at a particular disadvantage in competency-based interviews, to the extent that they can be said to be subject to a 'linguistic penalty' which excludes them from employment for which interviews are required, thus reproducing structures of social inequality in which migrants are under-represented across in salaried, secure employment (ibid). I posit, therefore, that the 'language barrier' is in effect a kind of border. The selective inclusion/exclusion of migrants from the spheres of employment and training on the basis of an amorphous concept of 'linguistic proficiency' is a bordering practice which reifies the distinction between 'language learners' and 'native speakers' of English – or between 'Them' and 'Us' (Paasi 2012; Anderson 2014).

In the context of the evidence above, any serious analysis of barriers to refugee education and employment must also explore the structures of racio-linguistic discrimination which refugees encounter as they search for work (Alim, Rickford and Ball 2016). These practices compound the structural barriers outlined in chapters 5

and 6, further inhibiting refugee access to education, employment and training in Wales. However, in chapters 4-6, we found that there was a significant difference between men and women's experiences of accessing education and employment. The following chapter will therefore explore the theme of gender, and the relevance of discourses on gender and culture to refugee women's access to education and employment.

7.5 Gender and Culture

In my sample of interview participants, I found frequent references to the notion that the resettled refugees belonged to a 'sexist' culture and that the men were withholding women and girls' access to education, employment and freedom of movement. This issue was an area of great concern for one interview participant, Wendy, who stated:

> 1 WR: Some of the dads are not allowing their female children to take certain routes in school.
> 2 It's a gender issue, it's a cultural issue,
> 3 it's non-liberty of the child.
> (Excerpt from interview with Wendy, case study area 4)

The awkward phraseology of 'non-liberty of the child' evokes a litigative, rights-based discourse, the implication being that the gendered cultural values of the dads are at odds with their children's rights under UK law. When the advisor was asked what she would change in the organisation of VPRS, she responded:

> 1 WR: I would explain to them the right of British women as well as their own,
> 2 things they just don't seem to understand.
> 3 And whilst there's this need to maintain an identity
> 4 it's not always in their best interests to do that in my opinion,
> 5 not the best interests for their children,
> 6 not the best interests in the development of the country
> 7 being here long term.
> (ibid)

According to Wendy, the refugee men simply don't understand that British women, as well as 'their' women, have rights. Wendy portrays the men as stubbornly maintaining an identity at odds with that which is in the best interests of their children and even of the 'development of the country'. In so doing, Wendy positions the 'sexist'

culture of the refugee men as backwards – the antithesis of progress and development in Britain. Furthermore, the men are lazy, more interested in socialising than punctuality, thus situating them firmly on the 'skivers' side of the binary detailed in section 7.1:

> 1 There's this cultural thing with Syrian gentlemen where it's 80% socialising and 20% business,
> 2 they can never arrive anywhere on time.
> (ibid)

Furthermore, Wendy portrays the Syrian men as having problematic attitudes to gender and sexuality:

> 1 Some of the men won't touch you because you're dirty because you're a white woman
> 2 and others have the idea that we are nymphomaniacs, very virile and that we very much want them.
> 3 We want them to become employed, we want them to have value and be safe here,
> 4 and these things are not addressed by the receiving charity
> 5 cultural and integration aspects or integration are not adequately considered.
> (ibid)

According to Wendy, the Syrian men are simultaneously lazy, frigid and lascivious – some not touching white women because they're 'dirty' (the connotation being sexually 'dirty'), while others are hypersexual, perceiving white women as 'nymphomaniacs', 'very virile', 'very much' wanting them. Passivity and hypersexuality are framed within Wendy's narrative as being two sides of the same 'deviant' coin. As noted by postcolonial gender scholars, the passive/hypersexualised binary is a common discursive trope in Western constructions of Arab and Muslim male sexuality, which is constructed as the Oriental 'Other' to our supposed enlightened Occident (Said 1978; Puar 2007; Owens 2010). Wendy's narrative reserves the sphere of rights, feminism, and employment as belonging to 'our' culture, a culture which the Syrian male "just don't seem to understand". In this way, Wendy uses the trope of the Syrian male as an inverted image, a negative against which the positive values of 'our' Occidental culture and society can be defined. Thus, as Patricia Owens writes,

The celebrated side of the binary only acquires its meaning through the subordination and exclusion of the Other – the sexually deviant Orient (2010: 1043)

It is this which Volpp terms "blaming culture for bad behaviour". As she notes, difficult behaviour is more frequently attributed to a group-defined culture when the actor is perceived to 'have culture'. Volpp states that white Americans (though the same is true for white British people) are discursively assumed to be 'without culture', thus when white people act in unpleasant ways their actions are rarely assumed to be typical of 'white culture' at large. In Wendy's narrative, it is clear that she has extrapolated her own negative experience with a Syrian man (or Syrian men) to be emblematic of 'Syrian culture' as a whole. The result of Wendy's racialised generalisation is problematic in that it assumes, as Volpp notes, "an exaggerated perception of ethnic difference that equates it with moral difference from us'" (Volpp 2000: 89).

But where is the Syrian woman amid all of this? How is her identity produced both in relation to that of her male kinsfolk, and to the construction of enlightened white culture? And what is the relevance to these racialised constructions of gender on her access to education and employment in Wales?

On the whole, the Syrian woman is framed as being passively acquiescent to the sexism of 'her' culture, as in this interview with David, education co-ordinator for a further education college:

1 DF: As much as we would see it as being a kind of very sexist culture
2 it's not necessarily an issue for the women
3 Because they've also got those kind of cultural values
4 and see it as a role
(Excerpt from interview with David, case study area 1)

David's narrative suggests a degree of subjective relativity, indicating that cultures which are viewed as sexist under the white Occidental gaze may be not be experienced as such by those within them. Nevertheless, as in Wendy's account, female equality, rights and empowerment are framed as being the preserve of 'our' culture. Similarly, 'culture' is framed in several interviews as a force which keeps Syrian women in the home and inhibits their access to employment:

1 DF: […] there's an issue then you know back into the culture in terms of
2 that's the men [who enter employment] and the women aren't used to going
3 and the men are quite resistant to it
4 […] I think that expectation for the women to be looking for work is a bit of a shock for them as well.
(Excerpt from interview with David)

1 They're not necessarily being forced to stay at home,
2 they're choosing to as well,
3 it's like a status thing.
4 And all the men they want other wives.
5 That's a status thing as well.
(Excerpt from interview with Wendy)

1 I noticed in the family information day today the men and the women were separated.
2 Cultural dynamics – it does make it harder [to support women into employment]
(Excerpt from interview with work coach, case study area 1)

Thus, the Syrian woman's freedom from the sexism of her culture is portrayed as being directly related to her access to economic independence and employment. The extent to which she is 'held back' by her sexist culture is measured by the extent to which she is willing to renounce the role of housekeeper and engage with jobseeking activities. As Lila Abu-Lughod notes in her book 'Do Muslim Women Need Saving?', these tropes are familiar narratives to us in the West. Through books, films, and political discourse, we have been drip-fed the "common Western story of the hapless Muslim woman oppressed by her culture" (2013: 9). In this narrative, the complexities of the Middle Eastern woman's life are ignored, her agency erased. Through her one-dimensional suffering, the barbarism of 'her culture' is revealed as antithetical to the moral superiority of Western humanitarianism. Thus, goes the narrative, it is the moral duty of enlightened white people to – to paraphrase Spivak - "save brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988: 92). In the context of this research and of the interviews above, access to education and employment for women is framed as being central to that which differentiates the civilised West from the uncivilised East.

In challenging these discourses, I am not implying that no resettled refugee women have ever been prevented from accessing employment or education, either by their husband or from a sense of domestic duty. I am not claiming that the behaviour of

refugee men towards their wives has always been unimpeachable, nor that some women do not experience control and violence in their homes. From my own experience of having organised community education courses for and with migrant communities, I have had to keep some women's participation in such courses secret from their husbands, as per the women's request. I have known women who have chosen not to engage with education and employment-related activities because they had too much childcare, too much housework, too little time to even think about getting a job. I have also known refugee women who were University professors in art history, or who were civil engineers, or managers of large firms.

The point I am making is that there is so much variety in the experiences of refugee or Muslim or Syrian women that it is impossible to make sweeping generalisations about the 'culture' in which they live, nor about the relationship of 'their culture' to their employment status. Islam, for example, is not a monolith. Different interpretations of Islam have been prioritised at various points throughout history. Which interpretation is dominant, and the extent to which that interpretation is supportive or not of the rights of women is very much dependent on the socio-political views and relationships of power of those that advocate that particular interpretation (Ahmed 1993). Similarly, Syria is a country of such religious, social, and political diversity, that reductive definitions of 'Syrian culture' are at best inaccurate, at worst deeply offensive. Indeed, prior to its descent into civil war, Syria had been among the handful of countries in the Middle East to introduce legal modifications promoting the equality of women in family law, and women had been making significant inroads to the workplace (ibid: 242).

There is much that is damaging in the reiteration of Orientalist tropes. In terms of the West's engagement abroad, the figure of the oppressed Muslim woman has been deployed to justify war military interventions in Middle Eastern countries on 'humanitarian' grounds – think, for example, of Laura Bush's address on the plight of Afghan women prior to America's 2001 war on Afghanistan (Washington Post 2001). Closer to home, feminist rights-based discourses have been appropriated by far-right movements to bolster female participation, citing a need to 'push back' against perceived 'Islamic misogyny' (Provost and Whyte 2018). With regards to this research

on refugee access to education and employment, I posit that the trope of a 'sexist culture' impedes rigorous analysis of the structural barriers which inhibit women's access to education and employment in Wales.

As I have shown in chapter 5, refugee women have access to less hours of language learning than refugee men, and a lack of childcare provision is a significant hindrance to participation in language learning for several of the refugee women in our sample. Furthermore, in chapter 6 I demonstrated that women are less likely to be considered as people with a desire to work than men, and thus have less access to statutory employment advice services (as far as these exist). Indeed, the dominant perception of refugee families as traditionally patriarchal among employment advisors may mean that refugee women who would otherwise welcome employment advice and guidance are being overlooked on the assumption that, owing to their roles as housewives, they do not wish to work. There was an implication of this in my focus group with participants from area 5:

1 IHL: Is there anything anyone would like to say about the support or advice they're getting [on] getting into employment,
2 is it good, bad?
3 Interpreter: Sorry, she [gesturing female participant] says she's not having any help.
4 I told her maybe now because you've got small child they won't ask you for any job or something
5 Because you […] have to take care of your child
(Excerpt from focus group, case study area 5)

In this excerpt, the female participant – who had been a teacher in Syria – had said that she was not accessing employment advice. The interpreter had then explained to her that 'they' (the work coaches) would not offer her advice as she had a small child she needed to look after. I doubt that this is the official policy of statutory employment services. What this excerpt does show, however, is that in the absence of a concerted effort on the part of employment services to listen and speak to their experience and ambitions, refugee women are susceptible to hearsay and misinformation regarding their entitlement to existing services. An interview with a work coach, Mary, highlighted the impact of a lack of community resources on producing isolation among refugee women:

1 MS: The most-progressed English-speaking mother has children in school and is learning from them […]
2 she says she's only got one friend.
3 Years ago we had communities,
4 she could go down the shops.
5 There isn't a mothers' group now.
(Excerpt from interview with Mary, work coach, case study area 1)

Refugee women thus face a cross-section of barriers to education and employment, including: a lack of access to advice; the paucity of language learning opportunities; linguistic discrimination; a lack of affordable childcare provision; and social isolation owing to a lack of community resources in their resettlement area. A 'sexist Syrian culture' is not to blame for any of these issues – if anything, they are caused by failure of successive British and Welsh governments to adequately address the root causes of the continued disenfranchisement of migrant women and women of colour. Reiteration of racialised/gendered tropes of cultural difference serve only to mask the structural barriers that refugee women face, while simultaneously erasing refugee women's voices and agency by positioning them as passive victims of their 'culture'. Furthermore, such discourses run the dangerous risk of providing fodder to nationalist right-wing movements, many of whom who co-opt feminist discourses in the pursuit of a white supremacist rhetoric.

7.6 CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented the barriers to education, employment and training experienced by refugees resettled in the convergence areas of Wales. The particular contribution of this paper is its attention to regional variation in spaces new to refugee resettlement. I have found that refugees resettled in Wales access an inconsistent patchwork of education and employment support. Moreover, refugees' success in accessing education, employment and training has been highly dependent on the local availability of resources already in existence prior to the establishment of the resettlement scheme – including appropriate training and employment opportunities. Additional funds made available for local authorities as part of VPRS have not, in all cases, been sufficient to bridge gaps in infrastructure in some of Wales' most socio-economically deprived communities.

On a more positive note, during my travels across Wales I witnessed considerable grassroots organising to foster a culture of welcome and togetherness. In many cases, volunteer organisations are stepping in to fill gaps in provision. Examples of voluntary schemes include befriending initiatives; English and Welsh classes; community dinners, and fundraisers. Such initiatives can provide a lifeline in the absence of formal provision. The considerable efforts of community activists in creating a culture of welcome and of providing vital integrative services should be recognised and applauded. Nevertheless, community organising should not be taken for granted, nor is voluntary provision alone sufficient to fill gaps caused by the absence of government-funded learning and employability schemes.

This research has shown that refugees face significant barriers in accessing education and employment in Wales. Several of the 'material' barriers noted in this work correspond to those already observed by contemporary scholars of refugee integration, including a lack of childcare provision; poor access to appropriate classes and courses; and the difficulty of evidencing experience and qualifications obtained abroad. These barriers do not impact all people in the same way, and future analyses should further explore the way in which intersections of age, gender, parenthood, geographical location, and mental and physical health (among other factors) produce particular education and labour-market disadvantages.

However, an analysis which foregrounds the material barriers risks implying that refugees could access fair and secure employment if only they had sufficient

resources (qualifications, language and skills) to do so. Such a discourse perpetuates a meritocratic myth that all have equal access to opportunity in Britain – that we all start on a 'level playing field' – and forecloses analysis of the structural disadvantage which hinders some while privileging others. If we understand sustained labour-market disadvantage as a form of structural violence, then – following Galtung's theory of the relationship between structure and culture – to understand the way this violence is maintained we must turn our attention to the realm of discourse (Galtung 1977; 1990). The myths we live by can perpetuate or dismantle hierarchies of power. It is to counter the myth of meritocracy that I have closed this thesis with a detailed analysis of narratives which prevent migrants and people of colour from accessing opportunity equal to that experienced by the white British-born.

In the context of a growing far-right, it may seem churlish to criticise the utterances of those who are advocating for, or actively working towards refugee resettlement, both in Wales and globally. In doing so I wish to emphasise that exclusionary discourses are not simply 'out there', the preserve of far-right extremists and white supremacists. Rather, these narratives are woven into the fabric of our society and have very real implications for refugees and migrants across a range of settings - from the careers office to the interview to the workplace. To remove the barriers to education and employment for refugees in Wales, we within the refugee-support 'sector' (as much as it can be termed such) must first understand the extent to which our own perception and actions are informed by narratives of exclusion. This critical self-reflection is particularly important for those individuals in gatekeeping roles, who hold the power to either enable or prevent a person's access to opportunity and development. Yet, it is not enough for us to do this work on an individual basis – behavioural change needs to be supported by managers, funders, colleagues, community – in short, it must inform the wider culture of the way people perceive and live alongside those who have migrated. And central to the culture of critical self-reflection must be the voices and experiences of refugees and migrants themselves. Without this inner work, we risk replicating the outcomes we are trying to change.

I don't want to close this thesis on a negative note. I would like to finish with a positive vision for the future. In a world where nation states are imposing the fixity of borders, humans will always find a way to move and to exchange their thoughts, ideas, and resources (Canagarajah 2017). Like humans, language is not static – indeed is at

the epicentre of the process of human mobility. Ideologies which perpetuate the notion that in order to truly belong in Britain one must speak a perfect version of the official language are out of step with the linguistic reality of so many. Britain is a multilingual country. Most people employ a variety of languages, codes and dialects on a daily basis in a way which totally disregards the hegemonic monolingual ideal. Narrative frames which idealise proficiency in a linguistic standard (typically English received pronunciation) delegitimise the lived experience of those who don't fit this narrow box – be they immigrants; speakers of Britain's Celtic languages; or simply speakers of another variant of English such Jamaican *patois* or Glaswegian patter. If language is a proxy for belonging, a gatekeeper for inclusion and exclusion, then to truly work towards building an inclusive Britain we must radically shift how we think about language (Polezzi et al. 2019). As well as ensuring access to language classes that acknowledge (rather than erase) linguistic diversity, so too must we promote the notion that we can all 'fit in' whatever our linguistic habits. The celebration of linguistic diversity is key to the process of building a wide and inclusive understanding of 'us'. It is only from this starting point that we can work to ensure that all – regardless of ethnicity, ability, gender identity or migration status – have access to the safety and security of belonging.

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